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## sustainable activism

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**Publisher & Senior Editor** - Joseph Roberts  
**Managing Editor** - Sonya Weir  
**Advertising Sales** - Joanne Fleming,  
 Adam Sealey, Phil Watson  
**Design & Production** - www.perublesky.ca  
**Proofing** - Anthony Prosk

## Contributors:

Robert Alstead, Steve Anderson, Alan Cassels,  
 Alicia Girard, Carolyn Herriot, Miceal Ledwith,  
 Mac McLaughlin, Vesanto Melina, Faisal  
 Moola, Geoff Olson, Gwen Randall-Young,  
 Joseph Roberts, David Suzuki, Eckhart Tolle,  
 Lionel Wilson

**Sales** - Head office 604-733-2215  
 toll-free 1-800-365-8897

## Contact Common Ground:

Phone: 604-733-2215

Fax: 604-733-4415

Advertising: joanne@commonground.ca  
 adam@commonground.ca  
 philwatson.cg@gmail.com

Editorial: editor@commonground.ca

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**Cover photo by Kent Kallberg**

Courtesy of the David Suzuki Foundation

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# Sustainable *activism*

A conversation with David Suzuki on his 75th birthday

interview by Joseph Roberts

**J**oseph Roberts: How did it all begin?

**David Suzuki:** We started when the Worldwatch Institute said it's the turnaround decade. We thought we were only going to be here for 10 years. So we said every dollar we raise we're going to spend because we don't have time. Who would've imagined that 20 years later we'd still be here and that conditions would be worse.

**JR:** And it hasn't turned around.

**DS:** No. We've had five years now of the most anti-environmental government we've ever had. We have a leader who claims the economy is his highest priority, proroguing parliament to focus on the economy and yet a leading economist like Sir Nicholas Stern says if we don't deal with climate change it's going to destroy the global economy. Our prime minister has never, ever, said this is an important issue affecting Canada and we've got to do something.

**JR:** My concern now is the way global economics is actually speeding up the destruction. With the UN declaring 2011 the International Year of the Forest and we have less than a third of the forest left on this planet, what is to be done?

**DS:** From my standpoint, I don't attend international meetings anymore. I went to Rio in '92 and Kyoto in '97. And we've had, you know, the Year of the Child and the Year of the Ocean and God knows all these wonderful things, but so long as we cling to this economic system, I don't see any way out of it. As you said, it's this economic drive that is just trashing the planet.

**JR:** At universities today, a higher percentage of students are focusing on the so-called 'financial industries' and less and less on the sciences and the arts.

**DS:** My parents were survivors of the depression and the lessons they taught me were, to me, very important. Live within your means, save some for tomorrow, help your neighbour as you never know when you might need their help. Simple lessons. My dad and mom said you need money to buy the necessities in life, but you don't run after money as if having more makes you a better or more important person. My parents didn't like to talk about money. They felt there was something about that – that you don't

just obsess over it. Now, we have over 500 billionaires. How can any human being be worth a billion dollars, and at a time when two billion people live on two dollars or less a day? This is an obscenity.

**JR:** And 17,000 children die of starvation every day. This is not right.

**DS:** But we revel in the economic antics of Bill Gates and these people and I think we've really lost our way in our obsessing with the economy.

**JR:** There was a line in a book by Matthew Fox that really stopped me: "The human race will not destroy itself from lack of information. The human race will destroy itself through lack of appreciation." Where do you turn to heal and regenerate yourself when dealing with these massive challenges we've just discussed and the consequences of being aware of and witnessing the ecological damage?

**DS:** It's soul-destroying to see what we're doing to the planet, but I have four grandchildren and spending time with them renews my determination. For me, the big breakthrough was, I used to come home late at night going, "I gotta keep going, I gotta keep going, I gotta finish..." And at one point I looked in the mirror and thought, "Who the hell do you think you are? You think you're so important you're going to make the difference? You're one human being. You've got to be part of a much bigger movement, but you yourself are insignificant." That relieved me of this terrible conceit that I was so important I had to give my whole life to the cause. My wife is always saying we need sustainable activism. Too many people put everything into it and burn out and what stabilizes us, of course, is family, and the things that we do together with family, like getting out in nature.

In Richard Louv's book *Last Child in the Woods*, he says we are now suffering from a whole spectrum of problems that are classified under "Nature Deficit Disorder." Our children need to experience nature and when you look at things like attention deficit or bullying or hyperactivity, these are all related to the fact that our kids aren't getting out there. Nature calms us; nature heals us. We need to have nature. We're growing a group of kids now that spend the least amount of time outdoors than any generation in human history.

I grew up in the 50s. We had a house with six people in less than a thousand square feet so it was a small house. I remember the constant refrain in our house was, "Get out of the house. Go out and play!" And if we said, "But mommy it's raining outside," she'd say, "Put a raincoat on and go on outside." And we'd be out in the ditches and the ponds, but it was a necessity because the house was tiny. Now, we don't want our kids to go out. There might be a pervert behind a bush or speeding cars. We want our kids inside and we'd rather have them playing video games or text messaging or working on the computer. We need to experience nature. It's certainly for me my touchstone and my salvation in terms of maintaining my sanity.

**JR:** If people don't love something, they're not going to protect it.

**DS:** Exactly.

**JR:** In the larger arc of your life going from childhood to being a professor, the many things you've done, have there been some common threads consistent to the weaving of it all?

**DS:** I don't know. I've never gone through life planning a direction. I mean, things happen. I was always taught that if you want to represent or stand for anything you have to be able to speak out. I don't like being the centre of attention. I don't like if people hate my guts. It goes against what I am. But I feel obligated to speak out.

I guess the driving force is that in 1941 on December 7 when Japan attacked Pearl Harbour, even though I was a third generation Canadian I sud- *continued p.14...*



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**DRUG BUST** Alan Cassels

**HEALTH**



# Cradle-to-grave screening

What are health authorities doing with all that DNA?

“**T**his will only hurt a little,” says the nurse as she cradles a brand new baby girl, all glowing pink and wrinkly. “We’re just going to take a little blood from her heel,” she adds, as she swabs the tiny foot, no bigger than the nurse’s thumb.

With one poke, a few droplets of blood are squeezed onto a filter paper and the baby’s brief, high-decibel howl signals the nurse’s job is done here. The blood spot card dries and is quickly whisked off to the lab for analysis.

The nurse assures the new parents, a bit bemused and exhausted from the birth ordeal, the heel prick test is necessary to find certain congenital disorders they should know about right away. The test can be used to detect hypothyroidism, an inability to produce thyroid hormone or phenylketonuria (PKU), a problem with amino acid metabolism, both of which are worth finding out about sooner rather than later.

But how many tests will that little blood spot go through? According to Perinatal Services BC, the group that runs newborn screening in BC, the blood of all BC babies is tested for 22 different diseases. Other jurisdictions might screen the blood for as many as 100 different conditions.

If there are markers for cystic fibrosis and sickle cell disease or other treatable disorders, signalling the child will need special treatment in order to avoid developmental disorders, liver problems or brain damage, these tests might find them. But are there any downsides to starting so early in our cradle-to-grave medical screening culture?

Well, for one, it’s not cheap. BC’s revamped newborn screening program cost about \$2.3 million to set up and it takes another \$2 million per year to collect blood samples from about 45,000 BC babies annually. The tests might find a problem in roughly 20 babies who will have one of a handful of treatable conditions. Another 20 might be found with a rare disease and they might benefit from the discovery. But 40 kids a year, out of 45,000 tested, means that for every 1,100 babies screened, you might find one with an abnormality you can do something about. Not bad, but not all diseases screened for at childbirth are easily treatable and it is possible the test might miss something important or find something that turns out to be insignificant. Can we be confident that whomever controls this little baby’s genetic sample won’t make it available to insurers, health authorities or even the police sometime in the future? Hmmm, I think maybe not.

Regardless of the best intentions of our medical authorities, we can’t ignore powerful commercial interests swirling around the decoding of the human genome and the fact companies will pay handsomely for the kind of data generated by our databank that contains the DNA of all of our children. Health authorities, including the ones in BC, are tasked with an incredibly important job: ensuring babies’ blood samples are collected in the most ethical way (which usually means through fully informed consent) and guarded by the strongest protection possible. But how does it work out in the ‘real world’?

A lawsuit against the PHSA (Provincial Health Services Authority), on behalf of a parent is currently before the courts. It charges that the BC government has been collecting and storing newborn blood samples from BC and the Yukon without the consent of parents.

According to Jason Gratl, the Vancouver lawyer arguing the case, the consent provisions around newborn screening have improved somewhat since he filed his claim in May 2010, but he maintains the BC government “has a secret and long-term DNA storage bank that was obtained unlawfully.” He says this DNA information “can say a lot about the children who donated the blood, but it could also say something about their parents.” Are the samples being used in research?

Yes they are, Gratl admits, but he adds, “The precise conditions under which the samples are being used for research have yet to be explored.” He says he



doesn't think there's anything malignant going on with the screening, but the "lack of consent over the long-term storage of the blood samples" is the real issue at stake. A judge will likely rule in the case this month.

While this lawsuit might improve consent provisions around newborn screening, there are a few general questions that anyone proposing population, "healthy-person" screening should answer, including:

Can the disease *only* be found with the test? Are there other more reliable ways to diagnose or predict this condition? Is the test always accurate in finding the disease in question? Does the disease occur with a high enough frequency in the general population? Does the disease have some urgency? Does it need to be found right away so things can be done to mitigate the disease's burden?

The tests for PKU and hyperthyroidism are generally accepted because the tests are accurate and early intervention will help treat the kids with these conditions. But what about the range of DNA tests that could be performed on this baby's blood? Is it wise to be carrying out genetic horoscoping on this baby just because we can?

GeneWatch UK, a non-profit group focused on genetic testing issues, has been a major critic of the modern push to use DNA to test everything. The organization wrote a paper in strong reaction to a government committee's suggestion that all babies born in the UK should have their genome sequenced.

Helen Wallace, GeneWatch's director, gets right to the heart of the issue when she says, "Genes are poor predictors of most illnesses so most children would get misleading information about their genetic risk." She added, "Most diseases in most people depend much more on social and environmental factors. Better

**We can't ignore powerful commercial interests swirling around the decoding of the human genome and the fact companies will pay handsomely for the kind of data generated by our databank.**

school dinners are much more important for most children than genetic testing."


Should we be concerned about DNA testing of our babies in BC or anywhere else for that matter?

The answer is "It depends." It depends how authorities intend to use our baby's DNA. Will they eventually attach it to her electronic health record, fusing personal genetic and health information so research and monitoring of disease can be done more efficiently? In some eyes, that scenario would be ideal.

According to GeneWatch, "Billions in taxpayers' money has been wasted in both Britain and the USA and medical privacy has been jeopardized, in an attempt to create the vast databases of electronic medical records linked to DNA that will supposedly allow scientists to 'predict and prevent' disease. A massive expansion in the drug market is predicted if everyone is tested."

What is clear to me – perhaps best symbolized by this ritualistic bloodletting of a day-old infant – is that genetics is going mainstream and playing an increasingly larger role in medical screening and the provision of healthcare. The heel-prick hurts the baby temporarily, yet her first outside-the-womb screening test will surely not be her last. With modern healthcare systems driven to screen for any and all diseases, this baby will face a lifetime of attempts to find disease in her body.

Right now, parents hand over their infant's DNA because it appears the benefits exceed the risks. The problem is we are not clear what we are risking. Will that little girl face a black cloud of a disease (which might be benign) hanging over her head or a greater lifetime risk of depression or anxiety? Or will she be discriminated against or stigmatized? Those are things we can't yet answer.

Genetic screening of our babies may allow us to know many things even as it undermines something many of us hold as sacred: the right, sometimes, not to know. 

**Alan Cassels** is a drug policy researcher at UVic and is currently working on a book on medical screening. Have you been screened for something and have a story to tell? Let him know at [cassels@uvic.ca](mailto:cassels@uvic.ca) Read his other writings at [www.alancassels.com](http://www.alancassels.com)



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# What's in a label?

## *Reading between the lines*

**T**he nutrition information found on food packages can help grocery shoppers make more-informed choices. Learning how to read a food label – and more importantly, how to understand a food label – can help you shop smarter, eat healthier and make more-nutritious choices. Examples of nutrient content claims:

- Source of fibre
- Low in fat
- Salt-free
- No sugar added
- Low calorie
- Trans fat-free
- Source of calcium

### The regulated label information

On a recent trip to the grocery store, a shopper looking at a low-fat product was overheard saying, “Why should I believe this is *really* low in fat? They’re just saying that to sell more products.” This shopper is mistaken. Claims like “low in fat” are regulated and cannot be used unless they meet certain conditions set out by the government, as outlined in the *Food and Drugs Act and Regulations*. These regulations ensure that you can trust the Nutrition Facts table and the nutrition and health claims found on packaged foods. The following food label information falls under these regulations:

### Nutrition Facts table

With its standard formats, the Nutrition Facts table

is easy to find, read and understand. Packaged foods must show the amount of calories and the amount of 13 core nutrients for a specific serving size of food. Some products may show other nutrients beyond the core 13, such as vitamin D or omega-3 fat.

### Nutrient content claims

Some product packages contain phrases to highlight a nutrition feature of a food, such as “saltfree” or “source of iron.” These are called nutrient content claims. Products must meet specific criteria in order to make these claims. When grocery shopping, you can use these claims along with the Nutrition Facts table to help you make better choices.

### Health claims

Certain diet-related health claims and biological role claims can be made on packaged foods that meet strict criteria. Diet-related health claims refer to the reduction of the risk of disease. Look for the following helpful diet-related health claims currently permitted on packaged foods:

- A healthy diet low in saturated and trans fats may reduce the risk of heart disease.
- A healthy diet with adequate calcium and vitamin D and regular physical activity help to achieve strong bones and may reduce the risk of osteoporosis.
- A healthy diet rich in a variety of vegetables and fruit may help reduce the risk of some types of cancer.
- A healthy diet containing foods high in potassium and low in sodium may reduce the risk of high blood pressure, a risk factor for stroke and heart disease.



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Biological role claims refer to the maintenance or support of specific body functions. An example is “DHA, an omega-3 fatty acid, supports the normal development of the brain, eyes and nerves.”

Remember that if a nutrition or health claim is used, the Nutrition Facts table must also be given. While claims are a good starting point, the Nutrition Facts gives more complete information about the nutrient value of a food.

#### Symbols: highly visible tools

CCFN’s 2006 Tracking Nutrition Trends (TNT) survey found that 80 percent of Canadians want food packages to clearly indicate products that are “healthier.” The key to finding healthier products is reading food labels and knowing which informa-

Nutrition Facts			
Per 3/4 cup (175g)			
Amount	% Daily Value		
<b>Calories</b> 160			
<b>Fat</b> 2.5 g		<b>4 %</b>	
Saturated 1.5 g		<b>8 %</b>	
+ Trans 0 g			
<b>Cholesterol</b> 10 mg			
<b>Sodium</b> 75 mg		<b>3 %</b>	
<b>Carbohydrate</b> 25 g		<b>8 %</b>	
Fibre 0 g		<b>0 %</b>	
Sugars 24 g			
<b>Protein</b> 8 g			
<b>Vitamin A</b>	<b>2 %</b>	<b>Vitamin C</b>	<b>0 %</b>
<b>Calcium</b>	<b>17 %</b>	<b>Iron</b>	<b>0 %</b>

tion to rely on. The Nutrition Facts table is reliable, but it’s not the first item that grocery shoppers see as it usually appears on the back or side of a package. Many symbols are now seen on the front of packaged foods. Of Canadians who read food labels, almost half (47 percent) look for these types of symbols when making food choices.

#### How to use symbols wisely

Symbols can be helpful because they bring your attention to products that may be healthier choices. If used correctly, these symbols can help you make wise choices at the grocery store.

To use symbols correctly, you’ll need to understand what they mean. Is the symbol highlighting one nutrient, like fibre? Or does it include an overview of many nutrients, like salt, sugar and fibre?

Be sure not to rely solely on the symbol as your criteria for making a purchase. Instead, use the symbol along with the Nutrition Facts table and list of ingredients to get the real story on a food. For exam-

ple, if a symbol indicates that the product is a good choice, check the Nutrition Facts table to see the actual sodium, fat, sugar and fibre content before you buy it.

#### Some advice to consider when looking at symbols on packaged foods

Symbols come from a variety of food companies and non-profit organizations so they do not share one standard set of nutrition criteria. This means that the health benefits of two products cannot be compared using only the symbols as a guide. The Nutrition Facts tables should be used to make direct comparisons.

The symbols may point out some health benefits of a product but may not reflect other less healthy features. For example, a product may have a symbol to show that it is low in fat and high in fibre, but the product could also be high in salt, which the symbol may not show.

Some products, such as baked chips or lower-fat cookies, may carry a symbol to indicate that they are a healthier choice than their full-fat counterparts. Before you buy, remember to consider how the food fits into your overall diet. Portion sizes are still important even if it’s a “healthier” choice.


Products with symbols may not be the only healthy choices in a particular category of foods. Many products without symbols are healthy choices as well so check the Nutrition Facts tables before you make a purchase.

#### As a general rule, choose foods that have LESS:

- Fat and cholesterol: Look for lower overall fat content and foods with as little saturated and trans fat as possible.
- Sodium: Sodium, or salt, is often used in packaged foods to enhance flavour and prolong shelf-life. Look for foods with as little sodium as possible.
- Sugars: Canada’s Food Guide recommends eating foods lower in sugar to help limit extra calories in the diet. No % DV has been set because there’s no recognized guideline on the amount of sugars that should be consumed by healthy populations. The amount on the label includes naturally occurring and added sugars. Compare foods and choose the ones that have less sugar.

#### Choose foods that have MORE:

- Fibre: We need 25 to 35 grams of fibre each day so choose foods that have a higher fibre content.
- Vitamins and minerals: These essential nutrients are factors in the maintenance of good health.

Looking at claims and symbols is a good starting point when trying to make more-informed food choices. Also remember to check the Nutrition Facts table and list of ingredients to get the most complete information about a food’s nutrient content. 

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# nutribites

## Team sprouts and supplements to boost broccoli's cancer-fighting power

**A** new University of Illinois study provides convincing evidence that the way you prepare and consume your broccoli matters and also suggests that teaming broccoli with broccoli sprouts may make the vegetable's anti-cancer effect almost twice as powerful.

"Broccoli, prepared correctly, is an extremely potent cancer-fighting agent – three to five servings a week are enough to have an effect. To get broccoli's benefits, though, the enzyme myrosinase has to be present; if it's not there, sulforaphane, broccoli's cancer-preventive and anti-inflammatory component, doesn't form," said Elizabeth Jeffery, a U of I professor of nutrition.


According to Jeffery, many people destroy myrosinase by overcooking their broccoli. And health conscious consumers who use broccoli powder supplements in recipes to boost their nutrition are also missing out. These supplements often do not contain this necessary enzyme, she said.

"There is a way to boost that powder's effectiveness, though. Broccoli sprouts contain myrosinase in abundance. And broccoli powder often contains the precursor to sulforaphane without the enzyme that would boost its healthful benefits," said Jenna Cramer, co-author of the study.

The scientists hypothesized that myrosinase from the sprouts would enhance sulforaphane formation and absorption from the broccoli powder if the two were eaten together. In a small pilot study, they recruited four healthy men who ate meals that contained broccoli sprouts alone, broccoli powder alone or a combination of the two. The researchers then measured levels of sulforaphane metabolites in the men's blood and urine after feeding. "We were looking at biomarkers – plasma and urine levels – associated with cancer prevention," Cramer said. Three hours after feeding, a definite synergistic effect was noted between the powder and the sprouts.

"There was almost a twofold increase in sulforaphane absorption when sprouts and powder were eaten together. It changed the way the subjects metabolized the powder. We saw plasma and urine metabolites much earlier and at much higher levels than when either was eaten alone," Jeffery said. This indicates that myrosinase from the broccoli sprouts produced sulforaphane not only from the sprouts but also from the precursor present in the broccoli powder, she said.

Other foods that contain sulforaphane and can be teamed with broccoli to boost its benefits are mustard, radishes, arugula and wasabi. "To increase the vegetable's benefits, you could sprinkle broccoli sprouts on your broccoli or make a mustard sauce to serve with broccoli," she added.

People who prefer to eat broccoli without sauce or sprouts should know that overcooking is the kiss of death for the important enzyme myrosinase. "Steaming broccoli for two to four minutes is the perfect way to protect both the enzyme and the vegetable's nutrients," she said. 

From: **ScienceDaily** (Jan. 31, 2011) — [www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/01/110127110707.htm](http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2011/01/110127110707.htm)

The study was published in the January 2011 issue of *Nutrition and Cancer*.



Photo © Laura Stone



# Healthy nutrition must lead *healthcare reform*

**H**ealthcare reform has fallen short of addressing the true importance of healthy eating because traditionally it has been more focused on treating illness rather than preventing it. While new medical interventions may reduce cancer mortality rates, they are ineffective in reducing the occurrence of major diseases such as cancer because they do not address some of the root causes of the diseases, including poor nutrition, lack of exercise and smoking, to name a few.

Today's educated and empowered consumer is helping to change healthcare with attitudes inspired by new values and a desire for natural and healthy foods. Consumers are helping to drive this transformation with expanded nutrition literacy. Terms like organic, natural, super-foods, antioxidants, healthy fats and whole grains are becoming mainstream. Consumers also recognize they have been misled as to what "good nutrition" really is and they are now driving the conversation around redefining healthy nutrition.

## Why is nutrition important?

Recent research shows whole foods are not only healthier, but they may also lower the risk of chronic diseases such as cancer, heart disease and diabetes. Nutrition is the number one area of interest for cancer patients at InspireHealth, Canada's leading integrated cancer care centre. They become keenly aware of its importance to promote their health and healing and to reduce cancer recurrence. The centre's medical doctors, who are committed to healthy living, strongly believe in the healing power of diet. They promote whole, organic, nutrient-dense foods to support the innate power of the immune system.

A recent study found that fibre in whole grains, beans, nuts, vegetables and fruit aids the body by promoting bowel movements, lowering blood-cholesterol levels, and improving blood glucose levels. People who consumed higher amounts of fibre, particularly from grains, had a significantly lower risk of dying over a nine-year period compared to those who consumed lower amounts of fibre, according to a new National Institute of Health study released earlier this year. Other studies have suggested fibre may lower the risk of heart disease, diabetes and some cancers. Although there's conflicting evidence about whether or not mortality rates may be reduced by consuming fibre, researchers, led by the National Cancer Institute, concluded, "A diet rich in fibre from whole plant foods may provide significant health benefits."

This year, the federal government is announcing new labelling guidelines to play their part in re-defining health

and nutrition. By restructuring the front-of-package labelling guidelines, Ottawa is attempting to increase consumer awareness so Canadians can make healthy choices and not be misled into buying unhealthy products that are marketed as healthy. Grocery chains and natural food stores are introducing "shopping guides" to assist consumers in choosing wisely. Certain restaurants are also demonstrating leadership by proactively revealing the sodium and trans-fat content of their dishes.



**New consumer expectations and demands are forcing food manufacturers to improve their products. Major food corporations are now researching natural foods and studying nutrition to expand their interest in the 'good-for-you' market; they are even developing products to help prevent and treat conditions such as diabetes and obesity.**

New consumer expectations and demands are forcing food manufacturers to improve their products. Major food corporations are now researching natural foods and studying nutrition to expand their interest in the 'good-for-you' market; they are even developing products to help prevent and treat conditions such as diabetes and obesity. While the increased action is promising, overblown health claims made by food companies have also drawn criticism as some take advantage of this trend for profit.

## A stronger call for healthy nutrition

It is increasingly important and easy to choose whole foods that are natural, organic, local, seasonal and unprocessed. Eliminate refined, highly processed foods and foods containing ingredients void of nutrients such as artificial flavours, colours, preservatives, artificial sweeteners and hydrogenated fats. Simply put, fresh, real, whole food is the foundation of health and disease prevention. Eating more raw and cooked vegetables, fruits, legumes (beans, chickpeas, peas), nuts, seeds and whole grains ensures optimal nutrients and helps the body to feel satiated. This decreases the desire to eat foods that are lower in nutritional value. Get your daily dose of healthy fats from plant sources, such as nuts, avocados and organic, cold-pressed oils such as flax, hemp, olive and borage. Minimize heat-extracted processed oils and saturated fats. If your diet includes animal products, choose leaner meats, seafood and eggs.

## Inspiring healthy change

While public interest in healthy nutrition is growing, it is still not considered mainstream for cancer prevention nor for integrated cancer treatment. As recent research shows, only five percent of North American cancer survivors are meeting experts' recommendations for diet, nutrition, physical activity and quitting smoking. This is a serious concern because using this type of prevention and an integrative approach have proven to prevent recurrence of disease and prolong lives.

While the growing healthcare crisis has generated more discussion about the value of healthy eating, cancer prevention and integrated cancer care must start with good nutrition and a healthy lifestyle. To do our part, we all must choose to feed our bodies in the healthiest and most wholesome way possible and continue advocating this practice to ensure these concepts become part of health policy. Let's help shift our healthcare system from 'disease care' to a true healthcare system. **K**

**Lionel Wilson** is Director of Communications with InspireHealth, Canada's foremost integrated cancer care centre. [www.inspirehealth.ca](http://www.inspirehealth.ca)





# Trusting your neighbourhood

In February, while returning from a serene vacation in Costa Rica – self-described as the “happiest country in the world” – during the bus ride to the airport, a thief stole the backpack containing all my valuables, including my passport, money and credit cards. In an instant, the ‘pura vida’ of the previous month vanished.

The incident provided an insight into Costa Rica, and my life, I would not have otherwise had. It was a miracle I left Costa Rica on a standby flight only four days later (two weeks is the norm) and I had a lot of help from many apologetic people. Unfortunately, after a month of seeing signs everywhere with the warning, “Keep your valuables within reach at all times” and security guards and police posted on every corner in the tourist districts, I had let my guard down.


**‘Making sure your neighbour is fed’ is my definition of food security and a climate of trust will pave the way to success.**

I was returning to a life in which I take trust for granted and where I don’t think about theft. Recently, the importance of trust between neighbours was bought home more strongly when I attended a gathering of the Gorge/Tillicum Urban Farmers community group (GTUF). In the fall of 2008, a few people in the Gorge/Tillicum neighbourhood of Victoria began meeting in each other’s homes to address the issue of local food security. When the group grew too large for living rooms, they started meeting at the Saanich Neighbourhood Place. GTUF currently has 70 members.

The early meetings were divided into two parts: sharing information about growing food and planning the group’s direction. The members added talks to the monthly meetings and some people worked toward a revision of the bylaw affecting backyard hens; one member helped create a food garden with Saanich Neighbourhood Place children.

Throughout the summer of 2009, they met socially for potlucks and in the fall they revised their mission statement and clarified tasks, encouraging members to take on various roles. The mission statement was revised to read as follows: “We choose to change direction and harness our collective creativity to adopt practices that allow us to develop resilience and live sustainably on our planet. Such a venture involves restructuring our food system locally, regionally and globally, to address the issues of global climate change, the depletion of oil and other fossil fuels, economic crises and potential earthquakes.”

GTUF now promotes itself through signs on properties that say, “Neighbours Growing Organically” and it links people with other food groups. It has organized its second Seedy Sunday; it offers tours of local food gardens and it is busy proposing a community garden in a local park to Saanich municipality. In 2010, GTUF received the Saanich municipality environmental award for sustainability.

GTUF’s objectives would be impossible to achieve if we had to live as the Costa Ricans do – behind iron bars, with barbed wire on top of property walls. My harrowing experience in Costa Rica taught me the value of cultivating and protecting trust and cooperation between neighbours as we organize to meet more of our own needs. ‘Making sure your neighbour is fed’ is my definition of food security and a climate of trust will pave the way to success. 

**Carolyn Herriot** is author of **The Zero-Mile Diet – A Year Round Guide to Growing Organic Food** (Harbour Publishing). She is a food security consultant and grows ‘Seeds of Victoria’ at the Garden Path Centre in Victoria, BC. <http://earthfuture.com/gardenpath/>

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# Vegan junk food

**B**ill Clinton has gone vegan. Oprah had her 378 staffers go vegan for a week and they lost 444 pounds collectively. To celebrate nutrition month (March), plenty of people are shifting their diets toward plant foods and becoming vegan or near-vegan. However, does this automatically mean they will be eating healthier?

Not necessarily. People often assume that becoming vegan means no more donuts, cheesecake, s'mores, gummy bears, ice cream bars, Cheezies, chicken wings or similar "treats" because 20-years-ago vegan versions of these did not exist. Today, however, vegan junk foods are yours for the taking. This evolution is wonderful and horrible at the same time. It can be a relief to provide your child with a delicious vegan ice cream bar at a gathering when youngsters are enjoying similar treats. And it's great that your family can enjoy s'mores or roast marshmallows around the campfire, without using regular marshmallows containing gelatin, a product from animal bones and the slaughterhouse industry. But if you get too cosy with these processed foods, your veggie diet can become almost as bad as the standard American diet or its Canadian counterpart that we had hoped to avoid.

In this busy world, convenience foods have a clear attraction. While popping a veggie pie in the microwave is faster than preparing dinner from scratch, it helps to take a step back. Processed, packaged foods are designed to tantalize your taste buds and keep you coming back for more. This task is accomplished with lots of salt, sugar and fat, all of which have a nasty way of coming back to bite you in the butt.

Not long ago, most people had no idea what the word vegan meant. Those who did regarded it as a risky dietary choice. Today, the word vegan is viewed in a more flattering light. This shift is the result of several decades of solid, scientific evidence confirming the safety, adequacy and considerable health benefits of well-planned vegan diets. As a result, you can walk into any mainstream grocery store and find products with the word vegan prominently displayed on the label. Producers use the word vegan to sell goods because consumers associate this word with wholesome, nutritious, ethical and green.

But don't be fooled. The word vegan on a label does not automatically mean healthful, low calorie, low fat, low sugar or a high nutrient content. Some of the unhealthiest foods – soda pop and deep fried, salty snacks – are 100% vegan. 

**Vesanto Melina and Brenda Davis** are BC dietitians and co-authors of these classic nutrition books: *Becoming Raw*, *Becoming Vegan*, *Becoming Vegetarian* and *The Raw Food Revolution Diet*. Brenda is based in Kelowna and is co-author of *Defeating Diabetes*. Visit [www.nutrispeak.com](http://www.nutrispeak.com) and [www.brendadavisrd.com](http://www.brendadavisrd.com)



## Gone vegan? Choose foods wisely

**Eat mainly whole plant foods:** Make vegetables, fruits, legumes, whole grains, nuts and seeds the centrepieces of your meals and snacks. Aim for 10 servings of vegetables and fruits per day, with at least three servings of greens each day. (A serving is a half-cup; with leafy greens, it's a cup.)

**Take care of nutrients** such as vitamins B12 and vitamin D: Use supplements or fortified foods where appropriate.

**If you eat vegan convenience foods**, do so in moderation: Frozen entrees, veggie meats, frozen,

whole grain waffles and packaged mixes offer variety, but stick mainly to whole foods.

**If you eat vegan "junk" foods**, do so only occasionally. Read labels! This includes the nutrition facts and the ingredient list.

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denly became the enemy. I believe Canada let down its principles and ideals, when we talk about democracy and equality and right to freedom of speech and all that. The only time those guarantees become important is when the crunch comes because if you can't guarantee them during the crunch then they don't mean anything. So the driving force for me is trying to get people to live up to their professed ideals. Canada failed again in 1970 when Pierre Trudeau invoked the War Measures Act. I think that, in a democratic society, there's no place for a War Measures Act. When I see poor treatment of blacks or Jews or gays or women, it's all part of the same piece and I find myself fighting against that.

But the driving thread now I guess is that as a scientist, a biologist, I can see that we are in a global eco crisis of unprecedented proportion. So even though I'm a geneticist, not an ecologist, I've been focusing more and more of my time on that message. You asked a question earlier I want to respond to. I began my career in television in 1962. At that time, I'd just come back from living in the US for eight years, where I got my



For me, the big breakthrough was, I used to come home late at night going, "I gotta keep going, I gotta keep going, I gotta finish..." And at one point I looked in the mirror and thought, "Who the hell do you think you are? You think you're so important you're going to make the difference? You're one human being. You've got to be part of a much bigger movement..."

education. I was appalled at the level of ignorance about science. There was no coherent science policy in government. The funding for scientists was abysmal and there was a total lack of appreciation that science, by far, is the most powerful force shaping our lives and our society.

I was born in 1936. When I was a boy, my mother and father wouldn't let me go to movies or swimming pools in the summer because they were afraid I would catch polio. Kids today have no idea what polio is. When I was a child, hundreds of thousands of people died of one of the most terrifying diseases we know – smallpox. There hasn't been a case of smallpox now for over 30 years. It's extinct. When I was a child, my parents never worried that I was watching too much television, playing video games or text messaging because there was no such thing then. There were no jets, no birth control pills, no computers, no satellites, no transoceanic phone calls. I've got a list of dozens of things – all as a result of the application of science – that have transformed the way we live. When I tell kids what the world was like when I grew up as a boy, they can't believe anybody's that old. And the first question is "What did you do?" A kid today cannot imagine a world in which you don't have a computer or text message and can phone anybody on the cell phone.

We are being hammered by the impact of science. Yet if you don't know anything about science how do you make decisions about stem cells, cloning, genetic engineering, artificial intelligence, space research, climate change, deforestation, toxic pollution. These are big issues and yet we are so ignorant as a society – we elect people to office who can't even assess the scientific advice they get.

I began my career in television to try to educate people about it. We now have access as a society to more information than people have ever had in human history. Anyone sitting there with a good laptop can access virtually every book in the US Library of Congress, every encyclopedia – information on a vast scale. Well, what has happened? It turns out we don't ever have to change our minds because there's so much information that if you want to believe global warming is crap you can find dozens of websites saying it's junk science, it's not happening. All you have to do is read the *National Post*; you'll never have to change your mind. It turns out we have too much information; you can believe any crazy idea you want without ever analyzing the information. "Ah, global

warming, pile of crap. I found a website that says there are all these scientists saying, "blah blah blah."

We're in a period that is really terrifying because a great number of the global warming skeptics are basically undermining the science. They're saying, "These scientists have their own agenda, 'climategate,' all this other stuff. You can't trust science." If we're at a point where we can't even trust science, we're in deep trouble because then you say the Koran says this, the Bible says this, Rush Limbaugh says this, Glenn Beck, Ann Coulter. You know, the Competitive Enterprise Institute, the Fraser Institute. Is that where we're going to go to because we don't want to face the reality of the world?

**JR:** Sometimes ignorance is quicker to conclude than to seriously investigate the truth.

**DS:** It's called dogma.

**JR:** Recently in Egypt, we saw masses of people in the street, motivated for some reason for some sort of change. But many people in North America aren't motivated to

take action because of their complacency. At the same time, you just touched on the way even new media and blogs are perpetuating unsubstantiated opinions that are not being challenged in any real sense. People believe all sorts of crazy things. It's like when the PR firm was hired to convince people that second-hand smoke was okay and tobacco is healthy.

**DS:** If you look at Naomi Oreskes book *Merchants of Doubt*, you find that the opponents to the idea that second-hand smoke is dangerous, or even that smoking is dangerous, are the same ones that ended up saying that global warming is baloney. It has its roots way, way back. It's a very interesting critique. She's an American scholar. What she does is trace the money for these various

denial movements and they all go back to a small group of scientists in the 1950s that were involved in the fight against the Soviet Union. It was communism vs. free enterprise capitalism. These were cold warriors who were scientists and top-notch physicists and when the Soviet Union imploded, what were they left with? So then it was, "Oh the goddamn EPA, the environmental protection agency, is trying to oppose regulations. This is the beginning of socialism. These guys are trying to get government," etc. So government and its agencies becomes the enemy of these people because it's the road towards communism. It's a very interesting analysis.

**JR:** I'm reading a book right now called *Super Imperialism* by Michael Hudson and it's the one book in the last five years that's changed my perspective on so much of what's going on here. Economics is driving this thing, but they'll be against anything that gets in the way and the one thing we've got to understand is that they want it all.

**DS:** The only reason corporations exist is to make money. They may do things that we need; they may produce something that is useful, but their *raison d'être* is not to improve the quality of life for humanity or whatever. Their whole reason for existing is to make money, and as fast as they can. The tragedy is we now have governments, because of the lobbying interests in the financing of candidacy, that have become boosters of the corporate agenda. We claim, unlike the Egyptians, that we live in a democracy. But when almost half of Canadians don't even bother to vote, we don't have a democracy. You always have to fight to get more.

The problem we face is not only that the corporate agenda has become the government agenda, but that the economic system, which we exist within, is fundamentally flawed and inevitably destructive. So you have companies like Patagonia or the Body Shop or Capers that are trying to do the right thing. But they live within an economic system that is fundamentally flawed.

I won't go into a long critique, but currently nature and nature's services – cleansing, filtering water, creating the atmosphere, taking carbon out of the air, putting oxygen back in, preventing erosion, pollinating flowering plants – perform dozens of services nature to keep the planet happening. But economists call this an 'externality.' What that means is "We don't give a shit." It's not economic. Because they're so impressed with humans, human productivity and human creativity at the heart of this economic system.



photo courtesy of the David Suzuki Foundation



Well, you can't have an economy if you don't have nature and nature's services, but economics ignores that. And that's an unbelievably egregious error.

Then to maximize the problem, economists actually think that, even though we actually live within a finite biosphere, the economy can grow forever. It can't. Nothing within a finite world can grow forever. Yet we've come to equate growth with the definition of progress and growth, growth, growth is all we drive for. Nobody ever asks, "What's an economy for? Are there no limits? How much is enough? Are we any happier with all this stuff?" No, we just say "growth growth, growth," and that's the be-all and end-all and that is suicidal.

**JR:** And we see examples – the Tar Sands, the Northern Gateway pipeline, fish farms, clear-cut logging. Each of these is an extension of what you're talking about.

**DS:** We now have a campaign on chemicals known to be carcinogens that are in cosmetics. Here are manufacturers that make cosmetics that are going to go right onto your skin, your lips, the most sensitive parts of your body and they don't give a shit



David Suzuki with Joseph Roberts  
Photo by Ishi Dinim

whether they're carcinogens or toxins in there. What kind of an economy would allow companies to do that? Look at your food. Food isn't about nutrition anymore. It's about carving out a place in the market, and if we're going to load it up with trans-fats to get it to taste better, or with sugar to make you want more, they'll do it. What kind of an industry is it where nutrition and health aren't the driving forces? It's got nothing to do with that. This is a sick situation we have.

**JR:** What do you do to stay healthy when all these things are being thrown at us, David?

**DS:** If you look at one of the common factors in reducing the risk of cancer, heart attacks, strokes, Alzheimer's, diabetes there's a long list – it's exercise. The human body was made to move. We evolved out of nature. Long before people used horses or invented cars, people did it by sheer muscle power. The human body needs to work in order to stay healthy. Working, moving around, is the best medicine we can get.

**JR:** And we have all these kids with early onset diabetes playing video games eight hours a day. It's nuts.

**DS:** It's absolutely crazy. When my kids were young and we used to walk them to school, I'd see these big sports utility vehicles roll up and then out would jump these roly-poly kids. You know, double bang for your buck – pollute the atmosphere with SUVs and drive your kids rather than walk.

**JR:** All this crap going on and life is still rich. It's still exquisite.

**DS:** I like to tell the story that my great mentor, my hero, was my father. When he was 85, in 1994, he was dying of cancer. He knew and he was ready for it and not afraid. Thank God, it wasn't painful. I moved in with him for the last month to take care of him, and that was one of the happiest times I spent with my father. Every night, my wife would come over with slides and come with the kids and show pictures of trips we've taken. In the

whole time, he kept saying, "David, I die a wealthy man. I'm so rich." In that whole time, he never once said, "Gee, you remember that closet full of fancy clothes or that 1987 Buick I had or the house we owned in London, Ontario." All we talked about were family, friends, neighbours and things we did together. That was my father's wealth and he was truly a wealthy man.

We've got into thinking things, stuff, are what make us happy, but it's not. I just spent 10 glorious days with my grandchild – just watching and being with him and there's nothing better than that. Those are the things that really matter and they renew us and recharge our batteries.

**JR:** There's so much I'd love to talk to you about. There are details, like the BC Water Act. One thing that came across – I was really inspired by an article by Marianne Williamson. She was saying we don't need to go out and get more people to become aware. God help them if they're not aware by now with all the crap going on. What we've got to do is connect the people that are aware and get them motivated to do what they need to do.

**DS:** I think you're absolutely right. I'm going to take part in a debate in a week or two and the topic is "Why is environmentalism failing?" I think it is failing big time. Part of the problem is the environmental movement that started in 1962 was very powerful. When Rachel Carson's book *Silent Spring* came out, there wasn't a single department of the environment in any government on the planet. The environment didn't exist. We've driven that. You can't imagine now, even on the municipal level, not having a committee on the environment. It's a part of the way we live. You think of clean air and clean water acts and endangered species. Huge amounts have been done. But we're still going the wrong way. We're still much more destructive than we were in 1962. The problem is our underlying value system. We've made the environment just another political project or issue.

I've talked to Elizabeth May about this, and thank goodness we've got the Greens to keep the issues on the agenda, but the reality is the environment is everybody's issue. We shouldn't allow the other parties to say, "Oh well, that's the Greens' issue. We can focus on the economy." The failure of the environmental movement is when you marginalize it to become just another special interest group and that's what's happened. We've got to broaden our tent way out. I don't call myself an environmentalist. Hunger and poverty, those are my issues. A starving person who comes across an edible plant or animal is not going to worry about whether it's on an endangered species list. They're going to kill it and eat it. I would. So if you don't deal with hunger and poverty, forget about the environment.

Someone living under pressures of genocide, terrorism and war is worried about saving their ass. They're not going to be worried about protecting the environment. We've got to broaden the tent out to human rights and social justice. Then we have a very broad tent. These are all our issues. So what is the challenge? In 1940, I was four-years-old, growing up in Vancouver, in Marpole. I remember vividly my dad taking me in the streetcar downtown to go to a movie and I suddenly said, "Daddy, I can read that sign." And in 1940 that sign said, "Do Not Spit." In 1940 there were signs telling people not to gob anywhere. Cut ahead 70 years and there are no signs saying "Do Not Spit." We don't teach our kids in kindergarten not to spit; we don't have spit police who throw people in jail because not spitting in public has become a part of our values as to who we are. There are a lot of societies I've visited where people gob on the floor of restaurants. I was in an operating room in China and the surgeon stepped back from the table while he was operating on this woman and gobbled on the floor.

*continued p. 32...*



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# From McLuhan to Mubarak

A sixties media guru's predictions prove prescient

For the people of the Mideast, it seemed like something out of a political fairy tale. At great personal risk, millions of peaceful protestors took to the streets and faced down security forces, sending two tyrants packing in Tunisia and Egypt. On that celebratory day in February when Egyptian president Hosni Mubarak fled for a Red Sea resort, I pulled a book by Marshall McLuhan from my shelves. It was a serendipitous choice for late-night reading. The University of Toronto professor, who died in 1980, had a few prescient things to say about people power in a networked age.

In December of last year, in the small town of Sidi Bouzid, police confiscated the fruit stand of an unemployed Tunisian graduate because he did not have a valid permit. To protest his continuing harassment from officials, Mohamed Bouazizi doused himself with gasoline and set himself on fire in front of government buildings. Bouazizi's cousin then posted a video on the Internet of a small, peaceful protest led by the young man's mother. The video went from Facebook to Al Jazeera's Mubasher channel, igniting further protests throughout Tunisia. The revolution was on.

The digital distribution of this flashpoint may have been a proximate cause for the Tunisian uprising, but the driving forces there – as in Egypt – were high unemployment, rising food prices and long-time state oppression. The Tunisians hit the streets, voting with their feet. They succeeded, against all odds, in unseating an aging kleptocrat, President Ben Ali, and overturning his regime. The activist contagion then spread to Egypt.

In chronicling the uprising in Egypt, western print media came out a distant second to the instant, global electronic networks. The fast-changing events gave the news a lifespan of mere hours. Only the Internet and some television outlets, like Al Jazeera, effectively communicated the mercurial situation in the streets of Cairo, which was watched by Egyptians remaining at home. Just by communicating the events in real time, the electronic media altered them.

According to figures from 2010, Egypt has one of the largest mobile communications markets in the Middle East, with 60 million cell phones in use in a population of 79 million. The median age for both male and female users is 24. 82-years-old. Mubarak and his cronies were sitting atop a youthful, wired demographic bomb and they knew it.

"Youth instinctively understands the present environment – the electric drama... wars, revolutions, civil uprisings are interfaces within the new environments created by electric informational media," McLuhan wrote in 1967.

The media studies professor was Canada's first intellectual-as-celebrity, fluttering from the ivory tower to think tanks to the late-night talk show couch. He even appeared briefly in Woody Allen's 1977 film *Annie Hall*, where he played himself. He skeptically dissected electronic media in print, even as he entered its embrace.



Marriage in front of tank, Tahrir Square, Cairo, February 6, 2011, during Egyptian Revolution. "Love, survival, perseverance and courage must win."

This endeared him to fans and infuriated other academicians, some of whom were convinced the professor was either an eccentric or a fraud or a combination of both.

It didn't help matters that McLuhan's writings were often tangential and hard to decode even before the public really understood what he meant by "the media is the message," a signature line he altered for *The Medium is the Message* in 1967 (the book I pulled from my shelf). While McLuhan has had a huge effect on social scientists and media critics who succeeded him, such as Neil Postman and Camille Paglia, few understood him in his own time. In retrospect, it was because his writings were like

messages in bottles, marked for distant shores. It took a few decades for the world to unravel their meanings. With the Internet and social networking, McLuhan has begun to make a lot more sense.

While Tunisians and Egyptians didn't need Facebook or Twitter to tell them how much they resented their respective regimes, such digital drum circles certainly gave the nations' young an opportunity to share their concerns, and strategies, with fellow activists in other Arab countries and the world beyond. It also allowed the Internet-



In that triumphant moment when the crowd learned of Mubarak's decision to step down, the euphoric uproar had a dreamlike quality – the archetypal cry of shared pain and solidarity, successfully battling against impossible odds. It was a moment as ancient as the Sphinx and as contemporary as a digital memory card.

organized "Day of Rage" on January 25 to set the stage for later events in Tahrir Square. The 'devil's radio' of street gossip did the rest, bringing millions out into the streets of Cairo, Alexandria and other cities, where people faced down security police armed with tear gas, rubber bullets, concussion grenades and water cannons.

"In an electronic information environment, minority groups can no longer be contained – ignored. Too many people know too much about each other. Our new environment compels commitment and participation. We have become irrevocably involved with, and responsible for, each other," McLuhan wrote in *The Medium is the Message*.



On January 28, the Egyptian government shut down mobile phone networks and the Internet, ordering servers to comply with an official gag order. By that point, the uprising was being carried along by its own momentum and, in spite of Mubarak's information blackout, a thin stream of messages still got through. The Doha-based broadcaster Al Jazeera and a small group of Internet activists armed with cameras and social networking accounts ensured this was the first national uprising to be tracked at ground zero, in real-time.

While many Egyptian Internet activists were identified and arrested by security forces, their growing global visibility made it more difficult to "disappear" them for good. Wael Ghonim, a 31-year-old Google marketing executive and Egyptian Internet activist, was detained by the state police on January 25. Kept blindfolded in solitary confinement and released 12 days later, Ghonim had no idea what the "Day of Rage" had grown into. His appearance before wildly cheering protestors in Tahrir Square was one of the signal events in Mubarak's fall.

McLuhan called media "extensions of man" not just the eyes and ears, but all the moral and intellectual faculties. Given human nature, electronic communication systems cut both ways, as instruments of freedom and control, connection and disconnection, enlightenment and distraction. Decades before iPads, crackberries and mobile phones, the prof noted, "Electric information devices for universal, tyrannical womb-to-tomb surveillance are causing a very serious dilemma between our claim to privacy and the community's need to know." He even intuited how the explosion of electric media could lead consumers to forgo privacy and share the most intimate details about themselves with strangers. "We are moving into a world of total involvement in which everybody is so profoundly involved with everybody else and in which nobody can really imagine what private guilt can be anymore," he predicted in 1967.

"The older, traditional ideas of private, isolated thoughts and actions – the patterns of mechanistic technologies – are very seriously threatened by the new methods of instantaneous electronic retrieval, by the electric computerized dossier bank – that one big gossip column that is unforgiving, unforgetful, and from which there is no redemption, no erasure of early 'mistakes.'"

It's uncanny that these observations appeared in print almost a half-century before 'cloud computing' began to turn individual privacy into a thing of the past, with personal information compiled for indefinite future reference by marketers, law enforcement officials and intelligence analysts.

McLuhan understood that technology, from the chopping stone to the television remote, is socially destabilizing by its nature. This is especially true when a rapidly introduced technology is integrated into society with difficulty. For example, the introduction of state-supported radio in Rwanda in 1993 allowed the public expression of ethnic animosities that were once kept safely within the margins of tribes. Death threats freely travelled on the Rwandan airwaves. A 2009 study estimated the broadcasts explained an increase in violence that amounted to 45,000 Tutsi deaths, about nine percent of the total. Yet in the Mideast, the explosion of affordable mobile phones among a young, mostly poor population of Tunisia and Egypt did something quite different: it helped midwife a social upheaval against decades-long tyranny.

The cellphones and laptops were part of the Egyptians' networked, "leaderless"

revolution, which could not be decapitated quickly. Again, this cuts both ways.

According to a report in the *Huffington Post*, a company owned by the US aviation and weapons contractor Boeing helped with the Mubarak regime's crackdown on Internet activists. The Silicon Valley firm Narus supplied Egypt with "NarusInsight" equipment for monitoring telecommunication activity. It's not hard to imagine more IP numbers and calling records of tech-savvy protestors ending up in the hands of the Egyptian military, assuming they haven't already.


Google, Facebook, Twitter and even WikiLeaks all played their part in the Egyptian uprising, but it was the laser-like intent of the Arab people, putting their physical bodies on the line, that made the difference. In the days preceding the fall of the Mubarak regime, hundreds of thousands of Egyptians sang and prayed together in Tahrir Square. Christians formed a ring around Islamic protestors, protecting them as they prayed. Young people organized crews to remove garbage from the square, while thousands donated blankets, food, water and tents. The sick and wounded were tended with emergency supplies, as unarmed protestors faced down live ammunition, sticks and Molotov cocktails at the barricades, in order to defend the hundreds of thousands of unarmed demonstrators inside the square.

Protestors helped one another in making signs and banners and setting up charging stations for mobile phones and laptops. Jokes, poetry and songs were shared from microphones. Up to three million Christians and Muslims, young and old, men and women, rich and poor, were united in the spirit of resistance in the square. The people knew they had nothing to lose and everything to gain.

In that triumphant moment when the crowd learned of Mubarak's decision to step down, the euphoric uproar had a dreamlike quality – the archetypal cry of shared pain and solidarity, successfully battling against impossible odds. It was a moment as ancient as the Sphinx and as contemporary as a digital memory card.

The Tunisians and Egyptians demonstrated to the world that massively mobilized, nonviolent resistance can have a huge political effect. Yet the Egyptian social experiment is still uncertain. Was it a grassroots revolution or a sideways military coup? Behind the scenes, the western investor class is surely pushing its political proxies to ensure the status quo is preserved on the Nile, where 40 percent live on less than \$2 a day and youth unemployment runs over 30 percent. Mubarak fled, but the IMF, the World Bank, bond markets and the transnational corporations remain securely in place, as do the intelligence agencies of both Israel and the US, which are committed to ensuring Egypt remains a manageable client state of the First World.

Yet it could be very difficult to put the populist genie back in the bottle. The Egyptian people paid for the uprising with their blood and their military has granted the movement a legitimacy it did not have before January. Prior to that, it was unthinkable. And as of this writing, the street protests are spreading to Yemen, Bahrain, Libya and Iran.

"Tunis is the force that pushed Egypt, but what Egypt did will be the force that will push the world," said Walid Rachid, one of the wired activists behind the January 25th "Day of Rage." Billions around the world will be watching this prophecy catch fire or fizzle out, through television and the Internet. With global media, there are no remote places, McLuhan said in a 1965 CBC interview. "Under electric circuitry, nothing is remote in time or space. It is now." 

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A New Earth Eckhart Tolle

SPIRIT



# Mastery of life

You are a human being. What does that mean? Mastery of life is not a question of control, but of finding a balance between human and Being. Mother, father, husband, wife, young, old, the roles you play, the functions you fulfill, whatever you do – all that belongs to the human dimension. It has its place and needs to be honoured, but in itself it is not enough for a fulfilled, truly meaningful relationship or life. Human alone is never enough, no matter how hard you try or what you achieve. Then there is Being. It is found in the still, alert presence of Consciousness itself, the Consciousness that you are. Human is form. Being is formless. Human and Being are not separate but interwoven.

In the human dimension, you are unquestionably superior to your child. You are bigger, stronger, know more, can do more. If that dimension is all you know, you will feel superior to your child, if only unconsciously. And you will make your child feel inferior, if only unconsciously. There is no equality between you and your child because there is only form in your relationship and in form you are of course not equal. You may love your child, but your love will be human only, that is to say, conditional, possessive, intermittent. Only beyond form, in

Give up defining yourself – to yourself or to others.

You won't die. You will come to life.

Being, are you equal, and only when you find the formless dimension in yourself can there be true love in that relationship. The Presence that you are, the timeless I Am, recognizes itself in another, and the other, the child in this case, feels loved, that is to say, recognized.

To love is to recognize yourself in another. The other's "otherness" then stands revealed as an illusion pertaining to the purely human realm, the realm of form. The longing for love that is in every child is the longing to be recognized, not on the level of form, but on the level of Being. If parents honour only the human dimension of the child but neglect Being, the child will sense that the relationship is unfulfilled, that something absolutely vital is missing and there will be a buildup of pain in the child and sometimes unconscious resentment toward the parents. "Why don't you recognize me?" This is what the pain or resentment seems to be saying.

When another recognizes you, that recognition draws the dimension of Being more fully into this world through both of you. That is the love that redeems the world. I have been speaking of this with specific reference to the relationship with your child, but it equally applies, of course, to all relationships. It has been said "God is love" but that is not absolutely correct. God is the One Life in and beyond the countless forms of life. Love implies duality: lover and beloved, subject and object. So love is the recognition of oneness in the world of duality. This is the birth of God into the world of form. Love makes the world less worldly, less dense, more transparent to the divine dimension, the light of consciousness itself.

### Giving up role playing

To do whatever is required of you in any situation without it becoming a role that you identify with is an essential lesson in the art of living that each one of us is here to learn. You become most powerful in whatever you do if the action is performed for its own sake rather than as a means to protect, enhance or conform to your role identity. Every role is a fictitious sense of self and through it everything becomes personalized and thus corrupted and distorted by the mind-

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made “little me” and whatever role it happens to be playing.

Most of the people in positions of power in this world, such as politicians, TV personalities, business as well as religious leaders, are completely identified with their role, with a few notable exceptions. They may be considered VIPs, but they are no more than unconscious players in the egoic game, a game that looks so important yet is ultimately devoid of true purpose. It is, in the words of Shakespeare, “a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing.” Amazingly, Shakespeare arrived at this conclusion without having the benefit of television. If the egoic Earth drama has any purpose at all, it is an indirect one: it creates more and more suffering on the planet and suffering, although largely ego-created, is in the end also ego-destructive. It is the fire in which the ego burns itself up.


In a world of role-playing personalities, those few people who don’t project a mind-made image – and there are some even on TV, in the media, and the business world – but function from the deeper core of their Being, those who do not attempt to appear more than they are but are simply themselves, stand out as remarkable and are the only ones who truly make a difference in this world. They are the bringers of the new consciousness. Whatever they do becomes empowered because it is in alignment with the purpose of the whole. Their influence, however, goes far beyond what they do, far beyond their function. Their mere presence – simple, natural, unassuming – has a transformational effect on whomever they come into contact with.

When you don’t play roles, it means there is no self (ego) in what you do. There is no secondary agenda: protection or strengthening of your self. As a result, your actions have far greater power. You are totally focused on the situation. You become one with it. You don’t try to be anybody in particular. You are most powerful, most effective, when you are completely yourself. But don’t try to be yourself. That’s another role. It’s called “natural, spontaneous me.” As soon as you are trying to be this or that, you are playing a role.

“Just be yourself” is good advice, but it can also be misleading. The mind will come in and say, “Let’s see. How can I be myself?” Then the mind will develop some kind of strategy: “How to be myself.” Another role. “How can I be myself?” is, in fact, the wrong question. It implies you have to do something to be yourself. But how doesn’t apply here because you are yourself already. Just stop adding unnecessary baggage to who you already are. “But I don’t know who I am. I don’t know what it means to be myself.” If you can be absolutely comfortable with not knowing who you are, then what’s left is who you are – the Being behind the human, a field of pure potentiality rather than something that is already defined.

Give up defining yourself – to yourself or to others. You won’t die. You will come to life.

And don’t be concerned with how others define you. When they define you, they are limiting themselves so it’s their problem. Whenever you interact with people, don’t be there primarily as a function or a role, but as a field of conscious Presence. Why does the ego play roles? Because of one unexamined assumption, one fundamental error, one unconscious thought. That thought is: I am not enough. Other unconscious thoughts follow: I need to play a role in order to get what I need to be fully myself; I need to get more so that I can be more. But you cannot be more than you are because underneath your physical and psychological form, you are one with Life itself, one with Being.

In form you are and will always be inferior to some, superior to others. In essence, you are neither inferior nor superior to anyone. True self-esteem and true humility arise out of that realization. In the eyes of the ego, self-esteem and humility are contradictory. In truth, they are one and the same. 

Excerpted from **A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose** by Eckhart Tolle. Reprinted by arrangement with Dutton, a member of Penguin Group (USA), Inc. Copyright © Eckhart Tolle, 2005.

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# StarWise

March 2011

THE WHOLE WORLD watched as Prince Charles and Lady Diana tied the knot on July 29, 1981. At that time, I commented on CFAX radio in Victoria, BC, that the royal couple needed our prayers. Venus was passing over Diana's Pluto indicating concerns, jealousies, secret affairs and other such troubles going on and we know the rest of the tale.

William and Kate step up to the plate on April 29 this year and once again the whole world will be watching as they tie the knot. Kate's horoscope is hinting at the strong likelihood that she will bring two children into the world. Her overall health may play a big factor in how it all goes regarding her success or not in this endeavour. Prince William's horoscope is pointing to a most difficult and dangerous time in which he will have to thread his way carefully over the next seven years. His house of travel is not in the best shape and mishaps are indicated. William and Kate need our prayers. Check out [www.macstars.com](http://www.macstars.com) for a longer version of William and Kate's fate.

The spring equinox takes place at 4:21 PM, PDT on March 20. This is the most important date of the year in western astrology. The position of the planets on this day



**ARIES** Mar 21 - Apr 19

You are a diamond in the rough — multifaceted and highly talented and just needing some polish. Now is the time to put it all together. You're good at kicking things out of the way when they block you and now you must clear the past and move freely into the future.



**CANCER** Jun 21 - Jul 22

You weren't given that big claw for nothing. It symbolizes your tenacity and your ability to handle the rough-and-tumble situations of life. Your solar career sector is resonating strongly. Either you will be lauded and praised or booted out with possibly a great landing.



**TAURUS** Apr 20 - May 21

Soon, the grass will be green and the flowers in their bloom and you can enjoy all that life has to offer. It is time to clear up any concerns, debts, bad habits, obligations and machinations in order to enjoy the bounteous time heading your way in the late spring.



**LEO** Jul 23 - Aug 22

Leo rises at the time of the spring equinox, bringing the Sun strongly into the play. Matters related to the father, guru and the higher mind manifest. Travel is highlighted and a great spiritual change may come along as well.



**GEMINI** May 22 - Jun 20

In your world, it's all about communications, connections and whom you know. It is now time to add to your address book, as many doors are flying open. Tight circles broaden and all kinds of new entities enter into your sphere. Embrace it all.



**VIRGO** Aug 23 - Sep 22

Curious and wise as a fox, you may be longing for something more substantial on a spiritual level. A yearning that hasn't yet wholly manifested nips at your heels. The events of 2011 make a huge difference. It's all good and somewhat magical.

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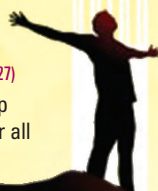
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gives many hints as to how the year will unfold. The Sun makes a conjunction with Uranus 13 hours after the equinox, which is a very strong indication that 2011 will be a time of great unrest and change. Revolutions, upheavals, weird weather and changes where necessary will be the steady diet. Uranus moves through Aries from March 11, 2011 to March 5, 2019.

Uranus is the planet of ideologies, innovations, inventions, revolution, upheaval and disruption. Aries is the sign of pioneering, new starts and fresh energy. The combination is perfect for those seeking new beginnings. It is now that we can strive to make a change as we move through a time I have coined the "Cardinal Onslaught." The cardinal signs – Aries, Cancer, Libra and Capricorn – are strongly activated and will be in play throughout this decade. It means there will be no rest given we have great work to do as we strive to bring peace and harmony to the planet. Gird your loins and make ready to go to work as we set forth into the future. Bring it on and let's dance; that's our best chance. Sing the song of freedom and sing the song of justice and let's dare to be bold and brave. Make a difference while we can. <



#### LIBRA Sep 23 - Oct 22

Your solar seventh house of relationships is lit up like a Christmas tree; hopefully, Santa fills your stocking. Approached another way, we might say it is a time of marriage or divorce. One way or the other, a big year is on board.



#### SCORPIO Oct 23 - Nov 21

You can play now and pay later or pay now and play later. One way or the other, a time has arrived in which you can make great strides and achieve some success if you devote the time and energy in the right direction.



#### SAGITTARIUS Nov 22 - Dec 21

The stars are leaning in your favour as a series of cooperative planetary aspects take place throughout the month. You can breeze through without much effort, which would be a misuse of an opportune time. Tackle the bigger concerns and objectives now.



#### CAPRICORN Dec 22 - Jan 19

The roller coaster is on the way to the top of the first hill. It's too late for regrets and "would've, could've" reflections. You must ride it out to its ultimate destination. The times suit you in many ways. Now the world needs you to lean in and help out.



#### AQUARIUS Jan 20 - Feb 19

2011 marks a great shift in your life. Venus nears Neptune in Aquarius, bringing love, mercy and compassion your way. The spring equinox hails an important shift. Aquarians will be on the move, as a highly innovative time approaches.



#### PISCES Feb 20 - Mar 20

Fiery Mars visits throughout March. Curbing your impulses and watching for mishaps and accidents are the general rules for dealing with Mars. If you have something to get off your chest, this is the time to do it. Kindness is the best policy though.

**Mac McLaughlin** has been a practising professional astrologer for more than 4 decades. His popular **Straight Stars** column ran in Canada's largest weekly magazine, the Georgia Straight, for 11 years. Email [mac@macsstars.com](mailto:mac@macsstars.com) or call 604-731-1109.

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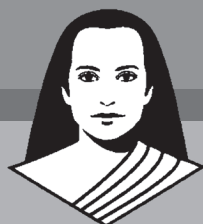


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# The origins of the human race and its implications for our *spiritual empowerment*

Most people know that, for several centuries, Jewish and Christian believers in the West were firmly convinced the universe was created six-thousand-years-ago. But what is not often realized is the extent to which this conviction and its companion set of beliefs still act as a major stumbling block in the way of being able to create the kind of reality we wish to experience every day. People everywhere are making valiant efforts to escape from the web of fables we have been spun for millennia. What we now know about human origins has an enormous amount of evidence that will empower that present-day journey.

It's been over 350 years since the Irish Archbishop James Ussher and the Cambridge professor John Lightfoot tried to calculate the age of the world, based largely on the evidence in the Bible. In my own theology lectures years ago, the students would always laugh when I mentioned that Ussher and Lightfoot had calculated the world was created in the year 4004 BC on October 23 at 9:00 AM.

That was fine as a tool for an undergraduate lecture designed to awaken students to the fact that things were seldom as they seem. Nevertheless, the efforts of Ussher and Lightfoot were very creditable achievements for their time. The usual ridicule to which they are subjected is often mainly due to an unfortunate small-mindedness about the circumstance of a past that was "all so unimaginably different" in terms of lacking perspectives and information which we take for granted today.

To create such a chronology was no small achievement. The Bible as we have it today was assembled from many different manuscript sources, over a long period of time during the Middle Ages, and besides there are many gaps in the chronologies of the Bible texts themselves. So it was not just a simple matter of adding up the ages of all the significant people in the Bible between the creation and Jesus Christ. Extensive cross checking with many other sources outside the Bible was necessary in order to establish that chronology.

It was largely due to an accident of history that Ussher's chronology became so well known and accepted worldwide for there were already half a dozen other such chronologies equally well based, such as the chronology of Bede, Sir Isaac Newton and Johannes Kepler. However, the new authorized English translation of the Bible that was to gradually become known as "The King James Version" had appeared only a few decades before and was only really attaining universal influence by the middle of the seventeenth century. After Ussher's calculations were published in 1650, the various printings of the King James Bible worldwide began to insert Ussher's chronology into the margins of the text of the Bible itself. So it happened that before long those calculations themselves began to assume the very status of Holy Writ in people's minds. For centuries, this effectively barred any significant inquiry into the dating of human origins in a more scientific way.

That was an extremely unfortunate situation as a true understanding of the circumstances of our origins is crucial in order to assume that power and strength which is the goal of our life's experience on this Earth. As the years passed, open-minded researchers found enormous problems in trying to reconcile Ussher's calculation of a six-thousand-year-old creation with the new facts about human origins that were beginning to emerge. Many saw the efforts of these researchers as nothing more than an attempt to edge God out of his own universe.

By the dawn of the 19th century, geology had calculated that life must have existed

on earth for at least 250 million years. And this was long before any theory of evolution ever saw the light of day. Enormous clashes punctuated the early 19th century between the geologists and those who curiously accepted that belief in God stood or fell with the accuracy of Ussher's chronology.

When Darwin's theory of evolution appeared, the issue of the age of the universe took a back seat in the priorities of believers, as they now had much more immediate crises on their hands. In place of the "God explanation," Darwin appeared to offer a much more reasonable mechanism by which life might have appeared, even though he never endorsed atheism or agnosticism in any shape or form.

Science's continuing attempts to date the creation continued to place the date farther and farther back in history until finally in 2003 NASA's Wilkinson Microwave probe calculated the age of the universe to be 13.7 billion years, with a margin of error of only two percent. Twelve years ago, a study of the human Y chromosome indicated the human race appeared between 50,000-250,000 years ago.

The present stage of research today inclines to a date well over 200-millennia-ago. In addition, it is crucial to note the human race appeared very abruptly, at least in geological and anthropological terms. After a period of well over a million years in which there had been no progress, humans suddenly increased their brain capacity by half, developed the physiological changes needed to facilitate speech and assumed our modern biological make-up. How did this happen?

The suddenness of this appearance has posed enormous problems for anthropology and geology for years. It is only recently that more plausible explanations have been forthcoming. In biblical research, many astute commentators had also long realized that the Book of Genesis was never intended to be a textbook of science, which also provided a detailed chronology of the earliest days of human and world history. Today, it is much easier to understand what Genesis actually was talking about, which is wildly at variance with what both traditional style beliefs and traditional science had assumed was its message.

By now, I believe it must be clear to any serious researcher there really has never yet been a serious debate between religious belief and science, but only between caricatures of each. But all these major problems posed by scientific advances in anthropology, biblical studies, archaeology and geology were only the beginning. In 1849, a massive collection of inscribed clay tablets in the ruins of the library of King Assurbanipal at Nineveh was discovered. That collection began to unfold a story whose remarkable implications about understanding who we really were only emerged gradually, and that was well into the mid-twentieth-century. Scattered throughout the museums of the world are over a quarter million tablets from Mesopotamia that go back more than five thousand years in human history. Many of them tell a remarkably different version of how the human race came to be than we were familiar with. And now it appears some of our most sacred texts in the Bible may actually have been modelled on these earlier 'pagan' works, principally the Book of Genesis.

Parallel to this research into the ancient texts, many practical archaeological discoveries and investigations were taking place at almost all the so-called sacred sites throughout the world. This research raised many obvious puzzling questions. How could such advanced technologies have come into existence in so many different places all over the world at the same time, and with no obvious means of communication between them as far as our records of the time went? These obvious questions were



**There really has never yet been a serious debate between religious belief and science, but only between caricatures of each.**



nothing in terms of impact compared to the less obvious ones that were now coming to the surface.

Over the past 10 years in particular, archaeological investigations in South Africa have given us a much more expanded understanding of the ancient peoples who walked this earth a quarter-million years ago. Now, it begins to appear they may have been the designers and engineers of our physical bodies. Obviously, to many fields in traditional science, all of this was a minefield. It was even more so to the traditional religions, who were now being asked to accept the hypothesis that the God of the traditional religions may have actually been a flesh and blood being, however advanced in technology.

Many of the all too human-style attributes of God that we read of in the sacred Jewish and Christian texts – and that have always been the stock-in-trade of church preaching – anger, displeasure at disobedience, punishment, fickleness, vengeance and the desire to be worshipped, now take on a very different appearance indeed. The whole elaborate structure in which we believed we exist – a life of moral testing, a redemption worked for us by Jesus from the consequences of our sin, the need for repentance, and a punishment or reward for eternity after death; all these and many another web of fables grew around such an all too human figure. It must be said such a caricature of God can have nothing to do with the real thing. Similarly, such a caricature of human destiny and purpose based on this kind of caricature of God has nothing to do with reality either and this is a much more serious matter. It took a long time for us to recognize how bizarre those beliefs really were. But the real tragedy is not that, but the fact that those beliefs have totally crippled our ability to manifest. Furthermore, the routine religious practices put forward by the religions compound that, crippling all afresh.

Establishing the truth about the circumstances of humanity's origin has amassed a body of knowledge that has proven to be very unsettling to many, but those people who are open and perceptive have begun to see that for the first time, we now have the opportunity to understand where we really came from. What is even more important is that we now know in truth what it was we came here to do. This is a far more important issue than establishing the date of the creation of mankind, but establishing that date was a crucial step along the way that gave us a whole new vision of our place in creation. Had we been imprisoned in the conviction of a six- thousand-year-old creation, we could have never have become open to the new discoveries about reality that have come to light in recent times and we could never have drawn the implications from that for our understanding of God and of human destiny and purpose.

It opened the door to understandings of major significance: how did we get here? Who are we really and what it is possible for us to do? Is this universe all that exists or are there other dimensions of reality? Given what we know about the structure of what exists, is there any real justification for a radical division such as we have had for so long between matter and spirit or between the natural and the supernatural? Are they not, after all, and however different from each other, only different stages along one continuum of reality? Was Jesus's promise that we could do all the miracles that he did meant to be taken literally after all?

Or will fear, guilt and the need to be taken care of ultimately defeat the opening up to those new potentials within the human person which now, with the new understanding of our origins and later history, we have come to realize we have? Ultimately, this is the greatest hurdle we have to overcome. People are willing to sacrifice almost anything except the belief in a benevolent "Parent in the Skies," who has taken the place of the beloved parents they were lucky enough to have during childhood. This really is the last great test. The real truth is when we are willing to move out of those beliefs that offer such spurious and deceptive comfort, it is only then we can access a power and ability that can take greater care of us than any imaginary "Benevolent Being in the Skies" ever could.

That power is the gateway through which humanity can open into real abilities and freedom and creativity in manifestation, in which there can be no more room for lack, fear, guilt, troubles, sickness, crying or sorrow, but only emergence into the freedom and power of what, all along, was our birthright.

I will be exploring these issues in greater depth at our conference March 4-5 at the Delta Airport Hotel in Richmond, Vancouver, along with the complimentary presentations of my colleagues Michael Cremo and Jeffrey Armstrong. ☐

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# Your emotional thermostat

Sometimes, the simplest, most self-evident truths are the hardest to live by. We read again and again about the fact that “life is what you make it” or “it’s how we look at life that determines how happy we will be.” So we practice our affirmations, breathe, keep trying to see the glass half full, but somehow, when we are not looking, niggling negatives creep in.

What usually happens is that our positive mindset works well until something goes awry. It could be anything from a flat tire to an argument with a teen, a bad hair day or the loss of a job. An unconscious ego reaction simply overrides our good intentions. It’s a little like walking along a balance beam and doing well, recovering from slight imbalances until someone comes along and pushes you off.

When ego does this, it is also acting like a saboteur. Life becomes a series of ups and downs and it seems we are at the mercy of things over which we have no control. Ego is like the little child that simply cannot ignore the teasing of a sibling. It has to react.

As long as ego plays a dominant role in our consciousness, we will be at the mercy of outside forces. Even if we have a good stretch and feel pretty good, there is often the thought it cannot last. Then we worry about what might interrupt the flow of life being good.

We can be so dominated by ego we actually believe the world out there is the problem and if it were different we would be happy. Imagine someone sitting at home freezing because it is very cold outside and they have neglected to turn on the heat. They bemoan the fact it is so cold and if only the sun would shine and the temperature would rise, they could feel warm again.

Is there any way out of this endless drama? Well, yes. Imagine you have an “emotional thermostat” and you are going to set it at “content.” Imagine that feeling of contentment, what it feels like in your body. You can do that, just sitting there reading this, without any-



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thing triggering that contentment.

When things happen and you feel ego rushing in to react, think of that feeling of contentment and bring it back to your body. It’s like sitting in that room, watching the blizzard outside, but remaining toasty warm inside. Granted, it is not quite that simple. However, the key is to remain centred, with the ability to respond rather than react.

We could also say that we are staying in touch with our inner observer. We can notice what is happening and if there is a problem we can keep our thermostat steady while we consider our options and make the best choice. Often, the best choice is to just let it go. If you get a flat tire, you get it fixed; if it’s a bad hair day, wear a hat; if a partner is cranky and snaps

*As long as ego plays a dominant role in our consciousness, we will be at the mercy of outside forces. Even if we have a good stretch... there is often the thought it cannot last.*

at you, give them a get-out-of-jail-free card because sometimes you do the same thing.

None of these things need to ruin your day. What about the bigger things? We know that things will not always go smoothly and problems are a part of life. Of course, we can feel sad or annoyed, but the goal is to quickly come back to our centre, regain our balance, do what needs to be done and regain our sense of peace. 

**Gwen Randall-Young** is an author and psychotherapist in private practice. For articles and information about her books, visit [www.gwen.ca](http://www.gwen.ca). See display ad this issue.

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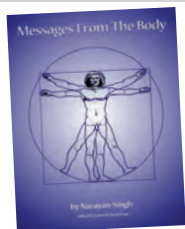


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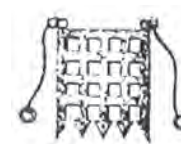


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...Suzuki from pg 15

So we in Canada understand that as part of our values, what it is to be Canadians, is you don't gob in public places.

But in terms of the environment, we're back in 1940. We have to say, "Don't litter, pick up, recycle." We have to tell people what to do. When what it is to be Canadian is to understand in our deepest roots that air, water, soil that gives us our food and plants that give us our energy are what we are. Those are what keep us alive and healthy. Then it won't matter whether you elect a right wing or a left wing government, because everybody knows that you don't mess around with our air, water and soil. That's what keeps us alive.

That's where we have to go, but right now we act as if, "Oh, air, well, you know, we've got an economic downturn, it's okay you can pollute the air a little more because we know it costs more money to have those pollution devices." We don't understand to our very soul that air, water and soil are the very source of life and biodiversity is what enables us to survive on this planet.

**JR:** You have found your gift to speak out. Which principles are important for people to get right now and which tools are really useful at this point?

**DS:** You're asking someone who's been, I think, a total failure. I've done the best I could, but I don't see much traction. To me, the most important thing is what I wrote in *The Sacred Balance*. It's the most important book I've written and it's simply trying to remind people that we are animals. There are lots of places, like in southern Alberta or part of Texas, where I've given speeches and told kids, "Don't forget we're animals." Man, their parents get pissed off at me. "Don't call my daughter an animal. We're human beings." We have this attitude that we deny our biological nature.

You can see it in the way we use language. If we call someone a worm or a snake or an ape or a jackass or a pig or a chicken, these are insults because we think somehow we're above these creatures and we forget the most basic thing. As animals, our most elementary, fundamental needs for our health and happiness are clean air, clean water, clean soil that gives us our food, clean energy that comes from the sun and biodiversity. Those are the rock solid foundations that we live on and must protect.

**JR:** I'm so happy that you've just been who you are. At the end of the day, it's about are we David or Joseph? Are we who we came here to be? Did we actualize our potential as that spark of life?

**DS:** I'm at an age now where I realize success, achieving what you're trying for, is not where it's at. It's the actual act of trying that is the important thing. If I'm going to die the way my dad did, I want my grandchildren to be with me and I want to look each of them in the eye and say that grandpa did the best he could. Not that grandpa succeeded in a bloody thing, but did the best he could. "I love you and this is what I've tried to do." I think if there are millions and millions of people that do their best, we can bring about huge changes.

**JR:** Absolutely. Now, what's your greatest hope? There's the reality of what's going on, but there's something inside of us as grandparents, parents, children. We need to become elders and wiser. Rather than getting old and forgetting, we should be realizing who we are and letting the rest of the world know that. So your greatest hope right now?

**DS:** Well, you know Moses Znaimer. He's now an elder and he doesn't like calling himself that so he calls himself a 'zoomer.' Now, as an elder, we're at the most important phase of our lives. We're no longer driven by a need for fame or money or power or sex. We're relieved of those things as elders. Our job, our responsibility now, is to look back on a lifetime of experience, of thought, and to distill from that some lessons we can pass on. That's our job as elders, dammit, because we can speak directly from the heart. There are no hidden agendas and we can tell the truth.


One of the most powerful groups in the peace movement were retired admirals and generals against nuclear war because they've gone through the whole system, but once they're free of that, they're retired, they can speak the truth. That, I believe, is the role that elders have today. We've been very marginalized. When we started the David Suzuki Foundation one of the first things we did was to ask a group of elders to come and be a council of elders for the foundation. My idea was that it would be like the role of elders in indigenous communities. You know, they're like rock stars in their

communities. I thought, well, maybe if we had elders sitting here, as people go about their jobs here, they might sit down and have tea with Mary or Bob and talk about their experiences as elders. Well, it turned out it never worked. We were so damn busy trying to save the world that we didn't have time for our elders. After 10 years, they're finally getting some traction now I think. They're going to do some good things. But we need to rediscover our elders and reintegrate them into society.

You asked what I would like to see done. To me, the most important challenge now is the economy. In 1944, as the allies saw they were going to win the war, the big question was what the hell to do with the world in which so much devastation had taken place. So they called a meeting of the allies in Bretton Woods in Maine. The drive was led by John Maynard Keynes, the prize-winning economist, and out of that meeting a number of steps were taken. Two countries that were absolutely devastated were Japan and Germany. They came back to become economic powers.

There were a number of problems. They set up a concept of development based on the northern model of the industrialized countries and then tried to globalize it. Which is crazy. We need diversity not a single notion.

But they left out nature. What's needed now is a Bretton Woods II conference to deal with the challenge of reintegrating nature as a part of our economy and of realizing that we need to have an equilibrium – an economy that doesn't grow. The economy is already far beyond the capacity of the biosphere to support it. We can't keep supporting it in this fashion.

We've got to work on a stable economy that is in harmony with the things that make it possible to have an economy. Which is nature – we've got to incorporate the economy as a part of nature and stop this suicidal notion that growth is the definition of progress. The industrialized countries have got to degrow their economies. We've got to shrink. We've been able to develop as economies because we've exploited the entire planet and the ecological footprint of a country like Canada is just massive, way beyond the land that we've got. This is the challenge for me – that we've got to have a totally different concept of economics. 



# If a tree falls in the **Year of Forests**, does anybody hear?

**T**he UN General Assembly recently met in New York to declare 2011 the International Year of Forests. The idea is to raise awareness of the priceless role that forests play in keeping the planet healthy and of the need for sustainable management and conservation of all types of forests. The International Year of Forests follows other lofty proclamations by the UN to encourage efforts to advance social justice and environmental sustainability, including the 2010 International Year of Biodiversity, the 1993 International Year for the World's Indigenous People and the somewhat unusual naming of 2008 as the International Year of the Potato.

It's easy to be cynical about the annual declarations made by our world leaders, especially as there's often a lack of corresponding action. Nevertheless, the International Year of Forests marks a critical moment on our planet. Our forest ecosystems have never been more at risk from the consequences of human actions, including climate change and industrial activities. But a few events in Canada, including the recent signing of the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement, give us some hope that 2011 will truly be the Year of Forests.

The world's remaining forests, from true wilderness like Canada's boreal forest to urban green spaces like the forested slopes that frame Vancouver, represent a Fort Knox of natural riches. Forests remain our primary source of paper and building materials and are receiving increasing attention as a source of bio-energy, all of which sustain millions of jobs in resource-based communities in Canada and around the world.

Forests provide food, clean drinking water and life-saving medicines like the rainforest-sourced cancer drug vincristine. They are also home to millions of indigenous peoples and habitat for over half of all known terrestrial biodiversity on the planet. And because they sequester and store billions of tonnes of carbon in their vegetation and peat and soils, forests are a critical shield against runaway global warming. Canada's boreal forest alone stores an estimated 208 billion tonnes of carbon, the equivalent of 26 years worth of global greenhouse gas emissions from fossil fuel burning.

Despite the importance of forests to biodiversity, as well as to our own health and well-being, we continue to destroy them at an alarming rate. Throughout the world and here at home, forests and woodlots are being ripped up and developed, degraded by free-for-all oil and gas development and mined and logged at a blistering pace. Less than a fifth of the world's original intact forests remain and although much of the best of what's left is found within our own borders, Canada is falling down when it comes to looking after our national natural heritage. We continue to clear-cut wilderness habitat when alternative logging methods exist; we have no national strategy to ensure our remaining ancient temperate rainforests are protected and provinces like BC continue to export millions of raw logs to be processed out of the country.

At the same time, no nation is better placed to deliver on the ambitious goals of the International Year of Forests than Canada. This past year, 21 forestry companies and nine environmental groups committed to present a joint vision to federal, provincial and territorial governments and First Nations for protection and sustainable management of Canada's boreal. This includes new protected areas, world-class forestry practices and promotion of environmentally sustainable Canadian forest products in the marketplace.

The success of the Canadian Boreal Forest Agreement will *continued p.34...*

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# Drop your cable

Still from *When We Leave*. Left to right: Umay (Sibel Kekilli) and Atife (Alwara Höfels). Photo by Christian Hünig.



Just caught Ron Mann's *Grass*, his manifesto for legalizing pot. Okay, so I'm a little late to the party. It originally came out in 1999. Drug laws in North America might have eased a little since then and the hysteria surrounding "reefer madness" that informed early US drug policy looks even more hilarious through the telescope of time a decade on. But this cheeky pop history of pot is still relevant and entertaining as it cruises through significant cultural and political landmarks in stoner history from Cheech and Chong to George Bush senior.

The 80-minute doc is one of the many free (well, by donation) video-on-demand programs available on Knowledge Network's website. Lately, I've been back to Knowledge.ca quite a bit, dipping into Mark Achbar and Jennifer Abbott's excellent documentary *The Corporation* (reviewed back in 2003 in this column), and lapping up several episodes of the BBC series *A History of Scotland*. Also on my watchlist is one from Knowledge's Storyville documentary strand, the 55-minute *Bloodied But Unbowed* ([thePunkMovie.com](http://thePunkMovie.com)). But you have to get in there quickly. Due to restrictions on internet rights, programs stay online for a limited time.


Of course, Knowledge isn't the only Canadian channel streaming full programs over the web although unlike other channels, it is refreshingly free of advertisements. You can find oodles of programming at CBC.ca, from David Suzuki's series *The Nature Of Things* (including the full-length tar sands feature *Tipping Point*) to hard-hitting news programs from strands the Doc Zone and Fifth Estate. If I ever find myself at CTV.ca, it's usually for a fix of funnyman Jon Stewart's *The Daily Show* or possibly *The Colbert Report*.

Then there's NFB.ca's growing archive of animation and documentary. This month's

additions include Gary Burns's wry documentary critique of suburbia *Radiant City*, a series of docs by Native filmmaker Alanis Obomsawin and Don McKellar shorts.

With so much online video, who needs cable? Video already makes up the lion's share of internet traffic and it will only keep growing so it's no wonder the recent CRTC decision to metre internet use in Canada has created such an angry backlash.

Meanwhile, back in the movie theatre, there's Feo Aladag's debut feature *When We Leave* (*Die Fremde*), a chilling drama about a young Turkish-German Muslim woman on the run from an abusive husband. In desperation, she and her young son flee Istanbul and travel to her family in Berlin, only to come up against their unsympathetic, traditionalist views. The film (out on the 18th) was inspired a few years ago by a series of honour killings of women in Germany.

On a lighter note, Tara Johns' *The Year Dolly Parton Was My Mom* (also out on the 18th) is a seventies-set coming-of-age drama sprinkled with humour and Dolly Parton songs. Shocked to discover she was adopted, 11-year-old Elizabeth gets all dolled up like her idol and takes off on a cross-country trek to find her real mother. The soundtrack includes original recordings by Dolly Parton as well as five Parton songs re-recorded by Canadian artists Martha Wainwright, The Wailin' Jennys, Coral Egan, Nelly Furtado and Franco-Manitoban singer-songwriter Geneviève Toupin. 


**Robert Alstead** made the Vancouver documentary **You Never Bike Alone**. [www.youneverbikealone.com](http://www.youneverbikealone.com). He writes at [www.2020Vancouver.com](http://www.2020Vancouver.com)

...*Suzuki* from pg 33

depend on whether Aboriginal people and their governments are involved and their rights as decision-makers respected. Where indigenous peoples have come together with environmental groups and other stakeholders, stunning victories have been achieved.

More than half of the ancient rainforests of Haida Gwaii have now been protected, thanks to the leadership

of the Haida First Nation. In Central Canada, five Anishinaabeg First Nations communities in Eastern Manitoba and Northern Ontario are working to have a vast intact region of boreal forest declared a UNESCO World Heritage Site. Covering no less than 43,000 square kilometres, the area is called Pimachiowin Aki in Ojibwa, which means "the land that gives life."

Forests sustain the very life-support systems of the planet – clean air, pure drinking water, productive soil and healthy wildlife populations. It's time we recognized our interdependence with them and treated them as the biological treasures they are. 

Learn more at [www.davidsuzuki.org](http://www.davidsuzuki.org)



# International Women's Day

## 100th Anniversary March 8

### Vancouver & Surrey events

**March 3: The Vancouver & District Labour Council invites you to its celebration dinner: 100 Years of Celebrating Women.**

Doors 5:30 PM. Dinner 6:45 PM. Fraserview Hall, 8240 Fraser Street (South of Marine Dr.). Entertainment by Solidarity Sisters & Bhangra Dancing & a short history of IWD & Labour by Joey Hartman & special guests. Tickets \$35/\$20 low income. ASL interpretation provided. Everyone welcome. For tickets, contact Keziah at the VDLC office: 604-254-0703 or office@vdlc.ca

**March 5: Parade of the Century on Commercial Drive & Festival at Wise Hall.**

Meet for parade at 12:30pm, McSpadden Park, Victoria Dr. between E. 4th & E. 5th). Parade 1-2pm. Route: North on Commercial Dr., East on Adanac to Salsbury Park, 1898 Adanac St. **Festival at Wise Hall:** 2-4:30pm, 1882 Adanac St. Includes carnival band music & local entertainment, a marketplace, booths, raffles, food vendors and a special kid zone. The event is open to all and

family participation is encouraged. The parade will feature women representing different times from the past 100 years, with labour taking responsibility for two main themes from that period remembering Rosie the Riveter and the 146 New York Triangle Shirtwaist Factory workers who died in the fire of 1911.

**March 5: Surrey's 16th Annual International Women's Day Celebration.**

12:30-4PM, Queen Elizabeth Secondary, 9457 King George Hwy, Surrey. Entertainment, snacks, door prizes. Children welcome. Info: Sandra, 604-597-4358 or Emily, 604-581-9381.

**March 8: The BC Federation of Labour Annual International Women's Day Breakfast.**

At the Firefighter's Hall, 6515 Bonsor Ave., Burnaby, 7:30-9am. Special speakers & full buffet breakfast. **Tx \$30.00 per person or \$240 per table (seats 8).** Tickets available for pickup at the door on March 8th, on a first-come, first-serve basis. Or order at [www.bcfed.ca/node/2043](http://www.bcfed.ca/node/2043)

**O**n March 19, 1911, more than one million women and men attended International Women's Day rallies campaigning for women's rights to work, vote and hold public office, and to protest the discrimination that cemented women's unequal status under law and custom. And on March 25, 1911, a tragic fire occurred at the Triangle Shirtwaist Factory in New York City, causing the deaths of 146 garment workers, most of them women, who either died from the fire because they were locked in or jumped from the fatal height. The fire led to legislation requiring improved factory safety standards and helped spur the growth of the International Ladies' Garment Workers' Union, which fought for better and safer working conditions for sweatshop workers in that industry. Though much has changed in the lives of women, we are facing very turbulent times and women are still working collectively to build a world that works for all of us.



**Independent Media** Steve Anderson with Alicia Girard

## Why care about the Internet?

**I**was recently invited to speak at an event put on by Gen-Why ([www.genwhymediaproject.com](http://www.genwhymediaproject.com)) called the "Why We Do It Party." What made the event interesting, besides the eclectic mix of speakers, creative performers and participants, was that the speakers were asked to talk about why they do what they do. Instead of speakers giving the usual talk about what they or their organizations do or about their accomplishments, we were asked to speak about what motivates us

For me, the efforts to close the open Internet (by metering or throttling) are a war on sharing, a war on creativity and ultimately a war on human potential.

to do what we do. It was nice to be forced to step back from the day-to-day excitement at OpenMedia.ca and actually remember what got me started in the first place and also for me to take some time to contemplate what keeps me engaged and motivated now.

Considering my work, the question really boiled down to why I care about the open Internet. I find the question interesting because I'm sure it's different for each one of us. For some, it might be about consuming content of your choice; for others, it might be the ability to share your art, to reach your family via skype, to debate on forums, to facilitate meet-ups around an area of interest and innumerable other activities.

So while I came up with my answer for the Gen Why event, it made me curious as to what others would say if the question were put to them. So I put a call out on my blog and the OpenMedia.ca Facebook page to see what people would tell me.

The answers I got were as diverse as Canadians are themselves. Some common

themes were benefits to humanity, education, free speech, dissatisfaction with traditional media, and my personal favorite: the Internet is basically everything.

Some had touching, personal stories to share. One person wrote, "I am on a disability for brain trauma. I have had the opportunity through the use of online learning and special programs to attain a B-average in university [studying] academic writing, psychology, anthropology and several courses in behavioural analysis and autism support. My goal is to become a support person for others who may also have challenges. It would mean the loss of my ability to forward my education and be of service to others if I were charged for Internet usage as well as access."

Others expressed wonderment: "I am a normal adult who grew up in the days before there was any such thing as an Internet. I never would have believed that all this is possible and it has changed the world in both good ways and bad. However, I believe that the Internet has changed the world in at least one very good way – and that is in our ability to share with each other."

For me, the efforts to close the open Internet (by metering or throttling) are a war on sharing, a war on creativity and ultimately a war on human potential. Perhaps I'm a bit too much of a romantic for my own good, but I think the Internet can bring out the best of the human spirit; I think it has the capacity to reflect back at us and encourage us to reach the potential for a more just and democratic society. The Internet won't itself solve the world's problems, but it does help break down barriers between us; it does make it easier to collaborate and self organize. For me, saving the Internet is important because the Internet holds the possibility for a better world.

**Steve Anderson** has written for **The Tyee**, **Toronto Star**, **Epoch Times** and **Adbusters**. [steve@openmedia.ca](mailto:steve@openmedia.ca), [www.FacebookSteve.com](http://www.FacebookSteve.com), [www.SteveOnTwitter.com](http://www.SteveOnTwitter.com)



# BANYEN BOOKS & SOUND

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## Talks/Booksignings at Banyen

- **M. J. Milne** *12 Golden Keys for a New World* **March 3**
  - **Michael Cremo and Mical Ledwith** **March 6** (see science-tosage.com for more event info)
  - **Jill Schroder** *Journeying Towards Authenticity* **Mar. 10**
  - **John Vaillant** *The Tiger: A True Story* **March 17**
  - **P. T. Mistlberger** *The Three Dangerous Magi* **March 24**
  - **Pepper Lewis** *Gaia Speaks: Sacred Earth Wisdom* **March 31**
- ### Other Events of Note
- **John Perkins and Llyn Roberts** *Shapeshifting Consciousness* **March 4-6** (see hollyhock.ca for more event info)
  - **Louise Hay and Friends** *I Can Do It!* **March 12-13** (see hayhouse.com for more event info)

Full events info @ banyen.com

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# Datebook

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## MAR 6

**"Shining Spirit" fundraiser** featuring a live performance by Jamyang Yeshe & the film *Shining Spirit*. 7:30PM, St. James Hall, 3214 West 10th Ave. Tickets 20/door, \$15/concession. All profits to Tibetan Resettlement project. [www.tibet.ca/Vancouver](http://www.tibet.ca/Vancouver) Email [vancouver@tibet.ca](mailto:vancouver@tibet.ca), 604-682-3269, ext. 7883.

## MAR 11

**Introduction to Hand Reflexology** commences Certificate Weekend Training Course. Introduction 7:30pm \$10; Course \$395. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818. [www.pacificreflexology.com](http://www.pacificreflexology.com)

## MAR 12 & 13

**Matthew Cohen of Exhale Yoga, L.A.** Exploration through Movement: Yoga, Tai Chi and QiGong. 4 workshops to choose from [www.soulspringwellness.ca](http://www.soulspringwellness.ca) 604-649-8522.

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## MAR 16

**Snatam Kaur Sacred Chant Concert** with Guruganesha Singh & Ramesh Kannan. Special guest appearance by Niranjan Kaur. 7:30PM, Centennial Theatre, 2300 Lonsdale Ave., North Vancouver. Tickets \$35/advance, \$45/door. (Plus HST). Tickets at Yoga West, 604-732-9642 & Banyen Books, 604-737-8853. Online [www.spiritvoyage.com](http://www.spiritvoyage.com), <http://tickets.centennialtheatre.com>

## MAR 18

**Snatam Kaur in Victoria** on Friday, March 18 at 7:30pm. Tickets: \$35 at Full Circle Studio Arts or Online at [www.SpiritVoyage.com](http://www.SpiritVoyage.com)

## MAR 18-20

**Indian Head Massage** weekend course with Susan Allen. Commences 7PM Friday. Course Fee \$350. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818, [www.pacificreflexology.com](http://www.pacificreflexology.com)

## MAR 19

**Wolfsong Chanting Circle** – Spring Equinox Celebration: 7-10PM. Participate singing sacred healing chants from the Spirit of the Land. At St. Mark's Trinity, 1805 Larch St. & 2nd Ave near W. 4th & McDonald. By donation. Earthsong Healing Circles. [www.shamanichealing.info](http://www.shamanichealing.info) 604.418.9636.

## MAR 19 & 20

**"Wellness Revolution,"** a weekend of workshops, holistic services, food, entertainment, door prizes. Rhodes Wellness College, info 604-340-9007, [www.wellnessrevolution2011.eventbrite.com](http://www.wellnessrevolution2011.eventbrite.com)

## MAR 19 & 20

**Me...Only Better:** A Workshop for Women interested in: Tools for fighting Depression and Anxiety. Building Self-esteem, & Self-awareness. 778 968.6011 or visit [www.creativecounsellingsociety.com](http://www.creativecounsellingsociety.com)

## MAR 20

**J.KRISHNAMURTI:** Exploring the Essence of Love - Crisis in Ourselves DVD & Dialogue Series, 4PM. Planetarium. \$5. 778-330-6639.

## MAR 24

**Transmission Meditation:** Personal Growth & World Service. Be part of the change unfolding now. Free presentation 7-9pm Roundhouse Community Centre (Pacific@Davie) 604-983-0926.

## MAR 25-27

**Osho Meditation Retreat** with Swami Anand Arun from Nepal. St. Mark's Church, 1805 Larch Street, Kitsilano, 10AM-5PM, \$35/day, [www.tapoban.com](http://www.tapoban.com), [www.jstdance.ca](http://www.jstdance.ca) Info/Tickets: (604) 925-3537, Rubai or Sumiran.

## MAR 26

**The Spirit's Journey:** Are you curious about reincarnation? Experience past life regression for yourself and be amazed by the sensation that lives within you. Travel beyond time and space into the depths of memory. Workshop, March 26, 11am -2pm, West Broadway location. \$70 contact Richelle Lemon @ 604-618-7457 CHT, or Louise Evans CHT, RCC @ 604-773-5595.

## APR 1

**Introduction to Foot Reflexology** commences Certificate Weekend Training Course. Introduction 7:30PM, \$10; Course \$395. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818, [www.pacificreflexology.com](http://www.pacificreflexology.com)

## APR 1-16

**Vancouver TCM Tuina therapy course,** Pediatric Tuina, Foot Tao Reflexology workshop, CMT, CTCMA continuing education. Downtown Vancouver. [www.tuinacourse.com](http://www.tuinacourse.com) 604-518-6455.

## APR 7

**Water for Life Benefit Concert:** 7:30PM, Michael J. Fox Theatre, Burnaby. Featuring stories by Mark Angelo and music by Holly Arntzen, Kevin Wright & their dream band. Tickets \$35, [www.ticketmaster.ca](http://www.ticketmaster.ca) 1-855-985-5000 [www.waterforlive2011.com](http://www.waterforlive2011.com)

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## APR 22-24

**Laughter Yoga Certification:** Be a Laughter Leader and fill your life with laughter and fun. No yoga experience necessary. [www.thesmilingyogi.com/laughter/](http://www.thesmilingyogi.com/laughter/) 604-267-2789.

## APR 28

**Fill Your Workshops With Ease:** Avoid the 3 massive mistakes workshop leaders make. Presented by Callan Rush. 7-10PM. Tickets free when you pre-register. In Vancouver. Call Katie at 1-888-686-7409. Also in Edmonton Mar 29 & Mar 31 in Calgary.

## SUNDAYS

**SOS (Science of Spirituality):** See Resource Directory listing in Spiritual Practices for schedule in Richmond, Vancouver & Victoria. 604-277-1247. All Welcome. [www.sos.org](http://www.sos.org)

**Centre for Spiritual Living:** Join us every Sunday @ 11 AM for practical spirituality with great music. An additional 9:15 AM Celebration Service begins March 27. 1880 Triumph Street, Suite 8 (at Victoria Drive), Vancouver. Info: 604-321-1225, [www.cslvancouver.com](http://www.cslvancouver.com)

## TUESDAYS

**Potluck Event & Garden Party!** Join us at 7pm the first Tues. of every Month for an organic, homemade potluck dinner. Bring something creative & enjoy our community garden in the parking lot. Ethical Kitchen, 1600 McKay Rd., North Van. 604-988-6280. [www.westonaprice.org](http://www.westonaprice.org)

**Reflexology Student Clinic** 6-10pm. One-hour sessions \$20. By appointment only. Pacific Institute of Reflexology (604) 875-8818. [www.pacificreflexology.com](http://www.pacificreflexology.com)

## ANGELS

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# BC's water

## sold to the highest bidder?

cally risk adverse and are simply defaulting to the blueprints of conservative governments around the world. This approach downplays the need for good governance and views markets as a solution that solves any and all problems.

To understand what the BC government is proposing, think of the current water use system as a bike share. Ultimately it's a community-owned resource that people (or companies) sometimes use for their own private purposes. And, like a bike share, the water use is supposed to be time limited and one is supposed to leave the water so that others can use it in the future. You're definitely not allowed to take the bike and sell it in the back alley!

What the BC government is proposing is that at some point in the near future, everyone who happens to be using a bike now owns the bike (and they didn't even have to buy it – it's just a gift from government). Going forward, anyone who wants to use a bike will have to buy it or rent it from these now new owners.


Sounds like a pretty sweet deal for the fortunate few who happen to have water rights – primarily electricity generators (including Independent Power Producers), oil and gas companies, mining companies and agriculture.

It's not that there isn't a potential role for using economic instruments as part of water management. But there's a big difference between using economic instruments as a policy tool and abdicating management to market forces. Many economic instruments – such as full cost accounting, conservation oriented pricing, water rentals that incorporate a reasonable return to the public for public resources – could be valuable and of real benefit. It's even debatable that, if BC had protections for the environment and the public interest in place, a limited water rights trading system could be implemented, but BC has a lot of work to do before it even entertains that discussion.


But I guess it's really no surprise that in the end BC's Water Act "modernization" is just another initiative that pays lip service to protecting the environment and the public interest while delivering the goods to the large corporate interests that have long dominated the province.

What's most dangerous about this proposal is that it will privatize water in a way that becomes effectively irreversible. Right now, one gets a "licence" to use water that the government may alter or revoke without, generally speaking, having to pay compensation. However, once the licence to use a public resource is converted into a tradable economic right, that is held and may be sold, any changes to the system that affect that right will undoubtedly spur lawsuits against the government.

If this proposal goes forward, you can pretty much write off any chance of ever meaningfully recognizing a human right to water or a public trust over water.

This will all come to pass unless the public convinces the BC government not to pursue this misguided course of action. The new deadline for the public to get involved is March 14. Take action at <http://blog.gov.bc.ca/livingwatersmart/> 

This piece originally appeared on the **Vancouver Observer** blog, January 26. Written by Randy Christensen. Reprinted with permission from [ecojustice.ca](http://ecojustice.ca) (formerly Sierra Legal Defence Fund.) For the rest of the series, check out [ecojustice.ca](http://ecojustice.ca)

  
BC's Water Act "modernization" is just another initiative that pays lip service to protecting the environment and the public interest. Get involved by March 14.

**F**or the past several years, there has been a multitude of discussion papers, extensive public consultations and big speeches from the BC government on the effort to "modernize" BC's Water Act. It's the law that governs who gets to use water, for what, when, where and who gets priority when there's not enough to go around.

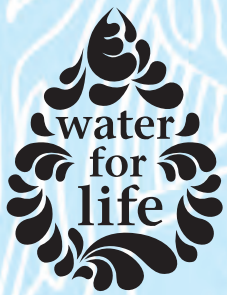
Everyone agrees the system is broken; it's only a question of what to do about it.

All of the public statements from June 2008 until December 2010 were unambiguous in promising strong legal protections for environmental flows and revisiting the antiquated and highly problematic "first in time, first in right system." More importantly, the BC government de-emphasized the potential adoption of "market reforms" such as "water rights trading" that has devastated communities around the globe.

But what was a well intentioned and well managed process seems to have fallen victim to BC's current political turmoil. In late December, the BC government posted the "proposed framework" for new water laws that introduces water rights trading (section 5). Troublingly, the strong legal protections for environmental flows have been downgraded to guidelines that merely have to be "considered" when someone wants to take water from a stream (section 1).

In the current leadership vacuum, those managing the process have become politi-





“WHEN YOU COME RIGHT  
DOWN TO IT, WATER AND LIFE  
ARE ONE AND THE SAME.”

— MARK ANGELO

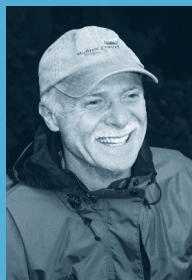
This girl travels 15km daily across Ethiopia's Omo Valley for water.

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